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## OR, The Siren of the Baleful Eye.

The Romance of a Strange Case.

BY JACKSON KNOX,  
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON," "THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE," "THE HARBOR DETECTIVE," "OLD GRIP," "OLD FALCON," "THE HURRICANE DETECTIVE," ETC.

### CHAPTER I.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

"SPEAK, doctor—your decision? I—I shall bear it like a man, whatever it is!"

These were Mr. Walsingham Bardine's words, spoken huskily, but with forced composure, at the bedside of his invalid wife, as old Dr. Cheatham raised his head from a critical examination of his fair patient, now oblivious of her sufferings in a deep, sweet sleep.

But the agonized demand was already answered, without speech, by the undisturbed cheeriness in the old practitioner's face.

"Ha! she will live, then? Speak!"



THE THREE MEN AWAITED THE DENOUEMENT IN PAINFUL SUSPENSE.

"I give you hope, Bardine—that is all. With unremitting, *sleepless* vigilance, nursing and care (mark that word *sleepless*) the patient has a fair chance of pulling through."

Mr. Bardine drew a great breath of thankfulness and relief as he grasped the physician's hand; and Aunty Venus, the faithful old black nurse, who had hung upon the medical announcement with a suspense scarcely less intense than her master's, clasped her fat hands with simple gratitude, and, rolling up her eyes till only the yellows of them were visible, murmured fervently, "Bress de Lord God in de Highest, an' Hallelujerum! my leetle missus am gwine to lib!"

"Come with me," said the physician to Mr. Bardine, who was also his intimate friend. "I see that you are haggard and worn out. But you must compose yourself, as I have more to say to you in private."

"Give me one minute, Cheatham. I—I am too happy! I must share these joyous tidings with Garda and Miss Valdemar without an instant's delay. I must—I must."

The doctor made a gesture of positive dissent, but Mr. Bardine had broken away impulsively from the tightening hand-clasp, and was already at the door, calling softly and yet excitedly down the passage.

His daughter Garda, a delicately-beautiful and sensitive-looking young lady of seventeen, and her governess, Miss Madelaine Valdemar, were almost instantly in the sick-room in response to the summons.

"She will live!" exclaimed the master of Redwood Grange under his breath, his haggard but nobly, intellectually handsome features lighting up with the great joy that had been poured into his heart. "Think of it, Garda! your darling mother is to be given back to us out of the shadows that were so remorselessly inclosing her. Miss Valdemar, you who are no less my wife's friend than my daughter's, think of it! Oh, the joy, the rapture of it!"

Garda had clasped her hands, the happy tears slowly filling her angelic blue eyes, while even the statuesque composure of Miss Valdemar's face—and a strikingly, mysteriously beautiful face it was—was momentarily mobile and softened.

"Come, I tell you!" interposed Doctor Cheatham, half-angrily now. "Are my wishes to be respected or not, I should like to know?"

With that, he unceremoniously turned the new-comers out of the sick-chamber, heedless alike of Garda's effort to kiss the sleeping invalid and of the governess's haughty stare, and, leaving Aunty Venus solely in charge, forthwith signed Mr. Bardine to follow him.

There were two rooms communicating directly with the sick-chamber, the immediately adjoining one, which was the invalid lady's boudoir, and beyond that a charming parlor, which had been improvised into Mr. Bardine's temporary sleeping-room since his hasty call to the bedside of his apparently-dying wife from a distant business trip, one week previously.

It was in the latter apartment that Doctor Cheatham sought his private interview with Mr. Bardine, after carefully closing the communicating door.

"Your wife will only get well through unrelaxed personal watchfulness on your part," said he, abruptly. "Take a good, long sleep now. You are sorely in need of it, and the fidelity of Aunty Venus can be absolutely depended on, I think, for the interim."

"True as gold—won't quit the bedside for an instant, you may depend. But," with a swift, anxious look, as they took seats facing each other, "do you mean to say that my wife's life still hangs by a thread?"

"I do; by a thread whose gradual strengthening beyond the danger-point, or attenuation back into hopelessness, rests solely with yourself—with your personal vigilance."

"Either old Venus or I shall be constantly at her side, as in the past week."

"Good!"

"You think this alone has brought her to this encouraging stage, then?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And yet prior to that my wife had the best of nursing, doctor."

"Venus could not be with her *all* the time, however."

"Of course not, but there were Garda and Miss Valdemar, while all the house-servants were then, as now, just devoted to poor Agathe, whom they fairly idolize."

"Ah! but the mysterious disease grew apace—would, in fact, have indubitably snatched its victim, but for your prompt response to my urgent messages."

"Thank God, that I made no delay in hurrying back from Kansas! But why was the situation thus, doctor? Come; is not the time come for you to give me the secret of all this, as you promised?"

"Yes; it is for that purpose that I am here with you."

"It is then owing more to incessant watchfulness, on the part of Venus and myself, than to your medicines that Agathe has reached her present hopeful change?"

"Decidedly."

"Why?"

"Because her mysterious *poisoner* has been held at bay just that length of time, giving Nature and my curative skill a fair chance."

Mr. Bardine was horrified.

"You mean it?" he gasped.

"I never give a false alarm, Bardine."

"Poisoner?"

"Yes."

"But, who can desire the death of Agathe Bardine—a little angel, without an enemy on earth?"

"I can't imagine. Leave that for future detective work. Our first duty is to get her well again. You will now perceive the vital necessity of your personal vigilance, upon which I so earnestly insisted?"

"Good Lord! I should say so."

Mr. Bardine covered his face with his hands, and reflected.

Then, summoning a servant, who entered from the adjoining main hallway, or passage, he ordered wine and sandwiches, which were speedily forthcoming.

"I shall not quit these apartments to-night, William; so do not permit me to be disturbed."

The footman bowed and vanished.

Both gentlemen partook sparingly of the collation before resuming the conversation.

"You are confident, then," Mr. Bardine thoughtfully resumed at last, "that poison was being administered to Agathe prior to my return?"

"I am."

"In what form?"

"I am unable to say. There's the rub, the humiliating perplexity. Perhaps it was being administered sub-cutaneously. A minute examination of the patient's entire body, for the puncture-scar of the hypodermic syringe, could alone determine that. However, even the scar, or scars, might be undiscoverable, though existent."

"Please explain."

"A poisoner of this sort would naturally proceed with superlative foresight and cleverness. The punctures could be made in a vein under the finger or toe-nail, for instance, or even in the scalp, under the thick hair, with an equally excellent chance against subsequent detection."

Mr. Bardine groaned. What insidious deadliness was this that, like an invisible cobra, was being harbored in the bosom of his heretofore fortunate household?

"Could any other poison than morphine be administered in this way?" he presently asked.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "Either strichnia, or numerous other poisons that I could mention, could be administered, with even a better chance for the baffling of investigation—prior," in a low voice, "to a *post mortem*, of course."

Mr. Bardine stretched forth his hand.

"Come again to-morrow," said he.

After stepping into the passage, hat in hand, and closing the door behind him, the old physician came to a momentary and watchful pause.

A graceful, white-clad figure, whose face he had glimpsed and recognized—the face of Garda Bardine—was just vanishing around an angle, leaving the suggestion of an interrupted eavesdropping.

"Very remarkable, this!" thought Doctor Cheatham. "The manner of a secret listener, and yet the manner of a somnambulist! However, Bardine has enough trouble on his mind at present; I shall keep my own counsel, and think this matter over."

He then took his departure.

## CHAPTER II.

### A VISION OF THE NIGHT.

MR. BARDINE remained plunged in a gloomy reverie, such as would naturally be superinduced by the astounding revelations just made to him.

Presently he started up, with a wild but resolved look.

"What can it mean?" he muttered. "Invisible murder striking thus at my wife's life from the very bosom of her cherished home! I am disposed to deem it rather a nightmare dream than actuality. However—"

He set his teeth hard, and lightly returned to where Venus was faithfully watching at the bedside of the sleeping patient.

The old negress had nursed Agathe as a baby, and Agathe's mother before her. No danger of self-deception here. He knew her devotion, her fidelity, her absolute trustworthiness.

"Venus," said Mr. Bardine, taking his seat at her side, "in order that between us, you and I, we should preserve my wife's life, now hanging by the merest thread, it is necessary that you should share with me the secret of her mysterious peril."

He then told her, in an impressive whisper, what we already know.

The final effect upon Venus was sufficiently satisfactory to him. Having mastered her primary horror and bewilderment, she sat, the incarnation of resolution and fidelity to the death, her arms folded over her ample bust, her thick lips compressed, her eyes resting now upon the white face of the sleeper, and now upon his

own features, haggard with sleeplessness and unrest.

Mr. Bardine smiled faintly.

"I see that I am understood," he said. "Now I can venture to take the full night's rest of which I am in such imperative need."

He softly touched his lips to his wife's brow, and, with a parting look of warning to the faithful nurse, returned to the front room.

For the first time since his hurried return to the Grange, and in spite of this new and theretofore unsuspected addition to his mental distress, Mr. Bardine felt that he must give way to the demands of exhausted nature.

In less than a minute after he had undressed himself and got into bed, he was plunged into deep, care-forgetting sleep.

This was scarcely seven o'clock in the evening.

Nine hours later, when the early light of the summer morning was beginning to steal into the room, Mr. Bardine suddenly awoke—alert, collected, and after such a recuperative rest as he had seldom, if ever, enjoyed before, but under circumstances whose startling impression was destined to linger vividly in his memory to his dying day.

A slender, white-clad female figure was bending over him in the uncertain light, with a raised poniard ready to be plunged into his upturned throat. She held something smaller in her left hand, which was clinched and drawn back—something that glistened like steel or glass. The face, however, of the intending murderer, was absolutely immobile and *dis-trait*, though wide-eyed and painfully intent, as if in obedience to a hidden, irresistible will other than her own—the hushed, absorbed alertness of a spellbound, witch-prompted soul.

It was the figure of Garda Bardine!

Imagine the appalled sensation of an unhappy father upon suddenly awakening to such a realization, in addition to the exceptionally painful perplexities to which he had already been groaning alive.

But Mr. Walsingham Bardine was a bold, cool man, much of whose youth and early manhood had been disciplined in trying difficulties and unusual hardships, such as cultivate that rare and priceless qualification, absolute presence of mind, into little less than second nature.

In an instant, by an adroit, swift movement, the girl was disarmed and in his grasp.

He then made a clutch at the shining object in her left hand, but had no sooner seized it than she broke away from him, opened the passage door, and disappeared.

The little instrument of which he had deprived her, no less than of her dagger, was entirely new to him, and yet he instinctively divined its purpose.

It was a hypodermical syringe!

Hurrying on a few garments, with a vague and growing apprehension for his wife's safety, he next heard a gasping sound from the inner room.

He rushed thither.

Venus was on her knees beside the bed, dazed or petrified, her eyes starting out of their sockets, the speechless gasps that he had heard issuing fitfully from her lips, and yet half-turned toward the door, with her arms entwining or defiantly lifted, as if frozen in the act of intervening between the helpless occupant of the couch and some recent intruder on deadly mischief.

And Agathe?

She was still unconscious, not placidly so, as early in the evening, but breathing stertorously, and (the covering had been wholly displaced from over her body) with one foot rigidly drawn up, as if in pain from some sudden torture but newly applied to it in her sleep.

Controlling himself to swift methodical action, by a great effort of the will, Mr. Bardine's first move was to examine this foot.

Upon the great toe there was a small drop of blood, that had doubtless oozed from a fresh though imperceptible puncture under the nail.

He glanced at the point of the syringe, which was like a needle.

Then, hurriedly replacing the covering over his wife, he unceremoniously brought old Venus back to consciousness by dashing cold water on her face and head.

"Don't try to speak till you have thoroughly collected yourself," he said, sternly, after assisting her back to her chair, and silencing her confused alarm with a masterly gesture, "and then tell me just exactly what has happened."

"Oh, Gory, Gory, Marse Bardine! you see—"

"Silence!" imperatively. "Now try again."

The nurse's story was soon extracted from her. She had suddenly been aware of Garda's entrance into the room, with such a hushed yet terrible stillness in her face and mien as to at once arouse Venus's alarm for her young mistress's safety, and put her on her guard. It was, to use the nurse's own words, as if a "big debbil had suddenly got inter de young leddy, an' war a-usin' ob ber to make murderin' mischief." Venus had, nevertheless, risen, under a hazy impression that her charge was in danger and must be defended. Instantly then, however, as the other threw out a sweeping gesture toward her, she had felt as if stricken by a paralyzing

and petrifying stroke; after which she had known nothing intelligently till restored by Mr. Bardine's cold water application.

Mr. Bardine touched a bell communicating with a small room, occupied by William, the footman—a faithful Cockney servant—for the past week.

"Mrs. Bardine is suddenly taken worse," said he, when the man had appeared with commendable promptness. "Hurry to the station and telegraph Doctor Cheatham to come. Better stop at the operator's house and take him with you."

William, who was a valuable and trustworthy man of few words, merely replied by a quick, sympathetic look, and then darted away.

No need to further enjoin old Venus, who was already bending over the unconscious invalid with such alleviating ministrations as could be offered.

Mr. Bardine went straight to the door of the governess's room—which communicated with a more pretentious one occupied by Garda—and knocked, not loudly but peremptorily.

Miss Valdemar's voice almost instantly responded, though in a sleepy tone.

"Rise and dress, Miss Valdemar!" commanded the master of the house. "I must see you instantly."

"At once, sir!"

His face seemed to startle her when she unlocked the door and confronted him, *en demi-toilette*, but she merely bowed and drew back with a slight blush, as he brushed past her into the room.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GOVERNESS.

The door communicating with Garda's room was closed.

"Where is she?" abruptly demanded Mr. Bardine, pointing to it.

Miss Valdemar gave him a surprised, bewildered look.

"In bed and asleep, I presume, as a matter of course," she replied.

Mr. Bardine softly but decidedly entered the adjoining room.

Garda was sleeping like an infant—the profound, care-free sleep of youth and health.

Satisfying himself beyond a doubt that his daughter's slumber was not feigned, Mr. Bardine, preceded by the governess, who had closely attended him, re-entered the latter's room, carefully closing the communicating door.

"You will pardon this apparent unseemliness on my part, Miss Valdemar," said he, "when I explain the cause of it."

"It is already pardoned, sir," replied the beautiful young woman, with a quiet dignity. "A true gentleman would not have ventured upon such an intrusion without absolute necessity."

"Thank you, Miss Valdemar."

He had already satisfied himself that her own unconsciousness of evil was perfectly sincere, though it may be mentioned, *en passant*, that feminine beauty was always of great moment in Mr. Bardine's impressions, and Miss Valdemar was something more than beautiful—she was fascinating.

"Is Mrs. Bardine worse?" asked the governess, quickly.

"Yes."

"Everything is excused then. Be kind enough to retire, Mr. Bardine. I shall finish my toilet with dispatch, and waken Garda."

"By no means. At least, not yet. There is something that I must first explain. It is imperative. Sit down." And he appropriated one of the two chairs the room contained.

She eyed him curiously, perhaps a little angrily.

"Not here, sir. It is not meet."

For the first time Mr. Bardine seemed to note the inappropriateness of his presence in the young woman's bedchamber—not a large one, as mentioned before, and with the suggestions of its fair occupant's abrupt rising and hasty toilet on every hand.

"No other place will answer—I must be near to my daughter while speaking with you, Miss Valdemar," replied Mr. Bardine, with a deeply apologetic gesture that was more expressive than his words. "Do sit down. I am old enough to be your father."

But not too old to be her lover under proper circumstances, he might have added, for Mr. Bardine, besides being a nobly handsome, fairly preserved man, was still on the right side of fifty. However, Miss Valdemar was tactful enough to perceive that a continuance of her objections on such delicate lines could but aggravate the matter. She accordingly seated herself without further protest, lowering her eyes submissively, while smoothing back her imperfectly arranged hair, which was blue-black, wavy, lustrous, and gloriously abundant.

She was doubtless not yet thirty, tall, willowy in form, whose slightest pose or movement was the perfection of unconscious, undulating grace, and of that unusual order of beauty oftenest met with among the upper classes of Old Castile, or where, in the south of Ireland, there is so clear-

ly visible a dominating Spanish ancestry mingling with the Celtic stock. That is, to a remarkably pure transparency, almost fairness, of complexion, she afforded the bewitching contrast of hair and eyes, including brows and lashes, of lustroas, velvety blackness. Yet stay; after the first cursory survey, we must except the eyes. At the first judgment, of the deepest, limpidest black, they betrayed under excitement, or even undue animation, an odd difference in color, no less decided than startling, but for their continued splendor, the right one being green as an emerald, the other grayish, but no less brilliant. It wasn't exactly an imperfection; at least, Mr. Bardine had never been able to determine whether it was so or not, during the unobtrusive year and a half that their owner had been installed as Garda's governess at Redwood Grange, though bound at times to confess that the unexpectedness of the color-change caused him a vague uneasiness.

Others might have called it rather a defect than an agreeable freak of nature. Furthermore, Miss Madelaine Valdemar, though of rather mysterious antecedents, was apparently a most exemplary young woman—an ideal governess. Her accomplishments were numerous and sterling, and she possessed the rare quality of imparting them to duller native apprehensions than her own by a species of inspiration. She dressed in quiet but perfect taste. Even the suggestion of *dishabille* in her hastily assumed toilet just now was invested with a certain delicacy, not to say rigidness, that would have repelled masculine presumption quite as effectually as the most elaborate of church-going toilets would have done.

Such were Madelaine Valdemar's externals; we may have more to do with her inner self as we proceed.

When we add that Mr. Bardine, though passionately fond of his young wife to the verge of uxoriousness, had, from the first, experienced the secret charm of the governess's personality to the full, but only to that degree that a high-principled gentleman might permit himself to be thus affected, enough will have been said as to his absolute unsuspicion of her instrumentality in this trying emergency.

In fact, after the first troubled perusal of her face, he at once became confidential, and with a sense of relief.

In five minutes he had acquainted her with the startling revelations of less than ten minutes previously; together with the substance of Dr. Cheatham's disclosures on the preceding evening.

Nothing could have exceeded the sympathetic naturalness of Miss Valdemar's emotions, as mutely expressed by face and gesture, during the reception of these startling confidences.

"Wait a moment, sir!" was her first comment. "I—I—this is too much! I must collect myself."

She had grown very pale, and seemed about to faint.

"Take your time, and bear up, I beseech!" exclaimed the unhappy gentleman. "Oh, you must not break down, too! It will never do."

"Of course not! Let me think. There!"

After pressing her hand to her brow she seemed to rally, and was presently altogether composed, though still very pale.

"It is simply horrible," she said, with forced collectedness. "Poor Garda! Was ever such a somnambulistic experience heard of?"

"Never! However, I am glad that your first impulse is to pity her."

"Otherwise, I were no true woman. Her own mother, too! And then, even in a nightmare's hideous prompting, to raise a murderous hand against *you*, sir—you, her own—" she came to a shuddering pause.

"Miss Valdemar, I must impart to you a secret connected with your unfortunate young charge, Garda Bardine—a secret unsuspected by herself, and known, I think, to but one person in the world besides myself—that person being Dr. Cheatham. Poor Agathe! she may never again return to the consciousness of it now, God be with her!"

"A secret!"

"Yes; Garda is only our child by adoption."

Out of Miss Valdemar's astonishment at this declaration, there gradually came a relieved look that vastly brightened Mr. Bardine's estimation of her.

"Of course, I could not have suspected this, sir," she said, after a long pause. "The less so, because I have always thought that she rather favored you, though having nothing in common with her lovely—with Mrs. Bardine." Mr. Bardine manifested some impatience, not to say uneasiness. "However, thank Heaven that it is so!" earnestly. "Of course, you understand me, sir?"

"Certainly; and I thank you!"

She bent her head.

"You would have this kept from Garda—everything, I mean?"

"Decidedly! I must still love her as my own; and she will doubtless awake in utter ignorance of what she has done. A psychological mystery it may possibly remain; but she must have no intimation of what has passed, even—even if

poor Agathe's death be the result." And he set his teeth hard.

Miss Valdemar slightly nodded her acquiescence, and then she bent her head toward the communicating door as if listening.

"Had you better awaken her now?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"Wait!" She made a strange sort of quivering gesture toward the door, which might, nevertheless, have been devoid of significance.

"I think it just possible—Ah!"

The door opened, and Garda stood before them in her night-dress.

There was just the faintest suggestion of the somnambulistic mechanicalness in her appearance, though she was wide awake, and the surprised look that came into her face at sight of Mr. Bardine was girlishly natural and sweet.

"Why, papa?" was all she could say. Then springing to him in sudden distress and panic: "Mamma is not worse?" she half-sobbed.

"Yes, that is it!" he kissed her forehead with anxious tenderness, and then passed her over to Miss Valdemar. "But let us still hope, my child. What were there left for us without hope?"

And he hastily quitted the room.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### THE WORST.

MR. BARDINE'S interview with Miss Valdemar had lasted over an hour, and his hasty exit from her apartment had been prompted by the voice of William, the footman, on the stairs.

Indeed, he had hardly stepped into the passage before he was confronted by the man, at the last landing, and, better than all, Dr. Cheatham was in his company.

"Ah, Bardine, well-met!" was the physician's low-voiced greeting, with a quick scrutiny of the other's face as their hands met. "Very fortunate for me. Was just up and dressed when William's dispatch found me, and then caught an up-train in the very nick of time. Very serious, eh?"

Before Mr. Bardine could reply, there was a wailing cry from Venus in the sick-room, toward which they were noiselessly approaching.

He signed William to guard the passage against intruders, and then darted headlong after the doctor, who had preceded him into the room.

Venus was striving to stifle her sobs, while the physician was already bending over the patient, his intellectual face torn with mingled disappointment and rage.

In spite of his being in a measure prepared for it, a groan escaped the husband of Agathe Bardine—that was, for there was no mistaking the marble pallor and ineffable stillness of that prostrate form.

The physician merely bent once close to the parted but breathless lips, and then passed his hand lightly over the unflattering heart.

"Bardine, be a man, as I know you can be." He took him by the hand and drew him toward the adjoining room. "The end is come."

"It war all in a minute!" sobbed Venus. "She jess wuk' up, broad awake, grabbed my han', pore missus! pore missus! 'Whar's my husban'?' she gashed under her pore bream. 'Don't—don't let 'em stick needles inter me no mo', Venus!' An' den she jess stiffened out, an' de angels bad her to demselfs. Oh, Lawd Gord a'mighty! my pore little missus, my pore little Missus Gathby, as I nussed when a chile!"

The two men exchanged a terrible look.

Then Mr. Bardine, collecting himself by a great effort, managed to soothe the nurse with a few cautioning words, and once more looked out on the passage.

"William!" the man, with an awed look, instantly responded; "tell Miss Garda and Miss Valdemar that"—the words seemed to choke him—"that the worst is come. Beseech them to resignation in my name. You might as well let the servants know, too. Then resume your post here. An unexpected and fatal relapse! That is all you need say."

Allowing the good physician to once more take his arm, Mr. Bardine broke away but once more—to throw himself on the inanimate body, and press his lips to the cold brow—and then followed him submissively into the front room.

Dr. Cheatham had nodded approvingly at the action taken with the old nurse and the footman, but no sooner was he alone with Mr. Bardine than his manner altered.

"Fatal neglect or intermeddling somewhere, or this could not have happened!" he exclaimed, sharply. "Which was it?"

Mr. Bardine, who had also grown hard and stern, before answering helped himself to a stiff glass of brandy, after the other had waved back the proffered decanter with an impatient gesture.

Then he replied, laconically, as they seated themselves at a little table by the open window:

"Neither!"

"What was it, then?" demanded the physician.

"Fate, or the foul fiend's spell, whichever you please. I give it up."

Dr. Cheatham looked at him curiously.

"Listen, and be amazed!"

And Mr. Bardine forthwith related, in the

minutest detail, the startling happenings of that eventful morning.

Dr. Cheatham was a scientific man, little given to the manifestation of his emotional nature, which was, however, none the less profound; for it is mainly your still waters that run deep.

If there were some betrayals of bewilderment and horror as the scarcely credible story proceeded, he was simply deeply, absorbingly interested toward its close.

"A most extraordinary illustration of the occult will-power, as exerted upon a human medium to malicious, murderous ends!" he exclaimed, half as if speaking to himself.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Bardine, anxiously.

"You shall know presently. But thank your stars, my poor friend, that the girl Garda is only your child by adoption—although I hold her absolutely innocent in this frightful matter. Understand that distinctly, Bardine."

"I have already congratulated myself in that particular, Cheatham," was the slow reply. "And I do understand you. I hold her innocent, absolutely blameless and unconscious; and so does Miss Valdemar."

The physician knitted his brows, but made a quick movement, as if putting an ugly thought to one side, or disposing of it for future reference.

"All this will have to be a dead secret, as a matter of course?" he said.

"By all means," quickly.

"Ah, of course. An inquest would be abominably inconvenient, to say the least—especially in view of the child's guiltlessness."

"Not to be thought of."

"I can make my own private investigation in the interest of science, though, and for our own satisfaction."

"Certainly, doctor. Is it your opinion that the former poisonings were—were also effected through the unfortunate girl's unconscious agency?"

"Yes; it is pretty safe to premise that."

"What do you think of the—the whole hideousness of it, anyway?"

"Just this: That, were the victim other than my patient and Mrs. Walsingham Bardine, I should consider it the most beautiful and confirmatory case of deliberate murder by proxy—of a remorselessly fiendish will-power working out its destructive purpose through a blindly submissive, unconsciously controlled, irresistibly impelled human agent—on record. Zounds! it is simply atrocious that it cannot be given to the scientific world."

"Murder by proxy!" repeated Mr. Bardine, bewilderedly.

"Yes, yes; hypnotism. That's the new name for it. Used to be called mesmerism. Much the same thing. The hypnotee is thrown into an abnormal or waking sleep, during which she or he is absolutely controlled and impelled by any suggestion—even the most diabolical, as it would seem in this case—on the part of the hypnotizer. Didn't use to take much stock in the thing. But, gad! here before our very eyes—a psychological wonder, sir, and—and a psychological horror, it must be admitted! Hem!" And then his brow darkened, as the criminality of illustration presented itself in all its hideousness.

"This is simply appalling!" groaned Mr. Bardine. "But, why should my life have also been attempted by this occult assassin?"

"Who can say? You were felt, perhaps, to be indubitably in the way at last, no less than the poor lady whose destruction has been accomplished. But let us identify our hypnotizing murderer first."

"But who can be?"

"He! Why necessarily a he?"

"What! some woman, you think?"

"I think nothing. But then there is no man who could have gained sufficient intimacy with Garda to have gained this malign control over her, is there?"

"Good heavens, no!"

The physician looked his companion straight in the eyes.

"What are Miss Madelaine Valdemar's antecedents?" he abruptly asked.

Mr. Bardine started as if he had been stung.

"To tell the truth, I don't know," he presently responded. "But this—such a hideous suggestion as this—will never do, doctor!"

"Why won't it?"

"No, no, no, I tell you! Miss Valdemar is a perfect lady—a beautiful and accomplished woman."

"Granted; and a woman of immense self-concentrated will-power, or I am no judge of human nature; and with one eye green and t'other yellow-gray—on occasion."

"Hush! hush! She particularly loved and admired poor Agathe—they were friends."

"You don't know that—no man ever knows when two women are really friends, even when most intimate with each other, to outward appearances."

He would have said more, but that Mr. Bardine here directed his attention to two figures walking in the garden below.

They were Miss Valdemar, gravely benignant

in her rare beauty, with her arm thrown protectingly around her young companion, Garda Bardine, who was weeping bitterly.

#### CHAPTER V. THE DETECTIVE.

A SILENCE fell upon the two gentlemen, even the rather cynical face of Dr. Cheatham taking on a troubled, doubtful look, while the pathetic figures remained in sight.

It was Mr. Bardine who first resumed the conversation when they had passed from view.

"My God!" he exclaimed, half-passionately; "I simply couldn't fasten such a diabolical suspicion on that superb creature, Cheatham, any more than upon poor little Garda herself!"

"Humph!" And perhaps Cheatham would have found equal difficulty in doing so on his own part, though he did not commit himself. "A puzzling kaleidoscope of a world, this, Bardine, and some of its men and women deeper riddles than the Sphinx herself ever mockingly propounded. Ha!"

"But, what is to be done? Why did you pause so abruptly? Did something suddenly occur to you?"

"Yes. But in the first place, there is my private *post mortem* and the funeral to be over and done with—in other words, the secret to be secured among ourselves."

"Yes; without a doubt, if poor Garda is to be saved from the destructive consequences of her misfortune, which of course must be done. But after that?"

"Then—a detective."

"Money-grabbing, unprincipled rascals, every one of 'em, more or less!"

"You mistake. Not all; there are noble exceptions to such an indiscriminate and rather libelous characterization."

"Oh, I am willing to stand corrected. But, who and where is the model detective to be found who could be intrusted with such a delicate and exceptional case?"

"I know of such a one. My use of the word Sphinx just now strangely enough brought him to my mind. For he has latterly been successfully concerned in complicated and delicate cases, analogous to this one;—private mysteries, involving the peace and reputation of excellent families, which he has unraveled so dexterously as to deservedly earn for himself that very name—the Sphinx Detective; though, in his varied and veteran detective experience, he has been widely known by other *noms de guerre* no less suggestive, one or another of which might be familiar to you."

"So! a paragon in his line, eh? a sort of psychological Vidocq?"

"Exactly."

"His name?"

"Falconbridge. Something of a recluse, latterly, too, I believe. And, now I think of it, he lives near you, here in Morrisania; occupying an odd little cottage and garden somewhere, together with an odd little old-young assistant of his, who looks like a boy, struts like a peacock, and mouths like an out-at-elbows tragedian on his last legs."

Mr. Bardine promptly arose.

"Let us seek him out at once!" he exclaimed, energetically, "No time is to be lost. My own life may be snatched by this murderous invisibility, if we delay, and immunity for the devilish perpetrator be thus secured."

"Nonsense! Remember the Latin proverb, Bardine—'Festina lente.' 'Hasten slowly.' You have poor Garda to think of first—to preserve the secret of this mysterious enormity against the prying world, until we can lay our hands upon the actual criminal, the *deus ex machina* of the terrible business."

Mr. Bardine was wise enough to permit this sensible counsel to prevail.

Mr. Walsingham Bardine was a middle-aged, good-principled and somewhat scholarly gentleman, of inherited wealth, living in his fine old family mansion—

"A brave old house, a garden full of bees, Quaint-liveried stock-pinks and green hollyhocks."

—in the old-fashioned Morrisania quarter of the Annexed District of New York City, north of the Harlem. Enough for the present has been outlined in the foregoing of his domestic relations, whose tragic mystery has furnished the impulse for the extraordinary disclosures that are to follow.

Three days had passed, and the remains of Agathe Bardine were in their last resting-place, without any public inquest having been held as to the real nature of her taking-off, which had been truthfully, though somewhat evasively, certified to by Dr. Cheatham, an old-school New York practitioner of enviable reputation, as proceeding from blood-poisoning, against which the constitutional energies, hopelessly depleted by malarial troubles, had been unable to successfully rally.

On the day following the funeral, Mr. Bardine accompanied Dr. Cheatham to the cottage of the professional mystery-solver, Major Falconbridge, otherwise the Sphinx Detective.

An athletic, medium-size, middle-aged, unassuming man, with an absolutely impenetrable countenance, that might have been judged

apathetic or dull, but for the eyes, which were those of an eagle, spiritualized—glowing with concentrated, slumbering power when at rest, superbly magnetic when animated, steadfastly, menacingly blazing when intently riveted, and doubtless of pitiless and fire-darting intensity when angry or indignant; the eyes of the untamed gyrfalcon set in a head of immovable bronze.

Such was the hermit-like detective of the Morrisania cottage, who listened, with scarcely a word of comment, to the story of Agathe Bardine's illness and death, as it was painstakingly recounted to him, with the most minute particularization, such as space has not been afforded for the reader's benefit in the foregoing columns.

Then, after a few moments' reflection, with lowered eyes, he merely said:

"I chance to be disengaged for the present, gentlemen. Do you wish me to undertake the case?"

"By all means!" exclaimed Mr. Bardine, who had been gradually prepossessed, while the old physician smiled his approval.

"All right. It is a fine summer day. Invent some excuse for Miss Bardine and her governess, sir, to be strolling about your grounds in the course of an hour hence. I may present myself thereabouts, though scarcely in my own proper character. Tommy Dodd!" with a slight elevation of the voice.

"Yes, sir." And an odd little fellow, with a mysterious air and a melodramatic pose, was almost instantly in the room.

"Follow these gentlemen to Redwood Grange, and report to me as to the lay of the grounds."

"Your humble servant, my liege lord!" with a ludicrously deep-base staginess of intonation, and a sweeping homage that included the trio.

"My fealty is my password." And the strange interview, in which scarcely a word had been wasted, was at an end.

An hour later, Mr. Bardine and Dr. Cheatham were smoking under a pretty little arbor at the extremity of the velvety house-lawn at Redwood, another rustic seat near at hand being occupied by Miss Valdemar and Garda. The governess was engaged upon a piece of embroidery, though casting frequent and anxious glances at her young charge, who, with a face and mien still profoundly and pathetically expressive of the household's recent bereavement, was making dispirited attempts to find some distraction in a book, that was for the most part heedlessly lying in her lap.

Presently, as Garda rose and listlessly strolled away toward some flowers that grew along an ornamental fence which separated the grounds from an adjoining by-road, Mr. Bardine said, in a low voice:

"Are there no signs of the violence of her grief abating as yet, Miss Valdemar?"

The governess's eyes were deeply, tenderly dark as she raised them in response to the question.

"Garda is young, sir, and her sorrow will speedily grow subdued," she replied, gently. "I shall do my best to lead her thoughts back into less mournful channels. But I deem it best to proceed slowly."

"That is best," interposed Doctor Cheatham. "Youth and time are wonderful grief-healers, when working together. Of course, you never let her so much as suspect—" he paused significantly.

"By no means!" with hurried earnestness. "Heavens, no! I should no more dream of letting her guess the unhappy truth than—than—"

Miss Valdemar, who had chanced to look toward the fence-paling while speaking, came to a startled pause, her gaze riveted by a strange pair of eyes from that quarter.

A trampish-looking fellow, the owner of them, was leaning over the rail.

Her eyes had become different hued, the one green, the other gray; the stranger's were seemingly of liquid, piercing flame.

There was a suggestion of the eyes of a serpent encountering the gaze of a falcon!

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### A SCHOLARLY TRAMP

"WHAT do you want, sir?" demanded Mr. Bardine of the man at the fence.

The latter thereupon directed his attention to the speaker, apparently to the no small relief of Miss Valdemar.

In spite of the fellow's seediness, there was a lingering air of distinction in his manner, as of better days.

"Have I the felicity, sir," he asked, in a husky voice, lifting his battered tile, "of addressing Mr. Walsingham Bardine, the infrequent but not unfamed *litterateur*?"

"You have spoken my name, sir."

"I am Theophilus Gainsborough, at your service—a scholar and a gentleman, though in unhappy luck," with a somewhat mournfully dignified gesture. "You ask me what I want."

"I answer, employment and a refuge from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune! Such is my desire, sir. If you might be in need of a secretary, an amanuensis, a shorthand writer—"

"Oh, I do not see how your qualifications

could be of service to me at present," Mr. Bardine began, a little impatiently, when a covert dig in the ribs from the physician's elbow was received, and then—for just here the man fixed him with those unmistakable falcon eyes—he too recognized that it was the Sphinx Detective himself who was making the appeal. "Ahem! that is—by the way, come around through the gate. It suddenly occurs to me that you might possibly—observe the word *possibly*, if you please—be of use to me."

As the man, with a new air of hopefulness, hurried along the road to a small gate some distance away, Miss Valdemar, who had thoroughly recovered her composure, if, indeed, she had exactly lost it, turned with a smile to Mr. Bardine.

"You will not deem what I am about to say presumptuous, sir?" she asked, quickly.

"I am quite sure I shall not," he replied. "What is it?"

"That man is not what he would make himself appear. He is thoroughly bad—a villain—dangerous! Though I cannot now tell you how or why I know this, and may satisfy you on that point at some future day, I do know it, positively, beyond the possibility of a mistake. I am not so egotistical as to presume that my services are of vital moment here—with a loving, regretful glance in the direction of Garda, still listlessly and unconcernedly plucking roses along the fence-line—"far from it. But self-respect, self-protection, sir, compels me to say that your surrender to that man's lying persuasiveness—that is, your giving him employment here—will necessitate my instant withdrawal from the exceptionally congenial position I have thus far enjoyed at the Grange."

There were tears in her eyes as she finished, and she at once joined Garda at the hedge, leaving both gentlemen not a little embarrassed.

The disguised detective came up to them, just as the governess was moving beyond hearing, with her bewitchingly undulating grace, her arm once more thrown about her pupil's waist.

He looked after the retreating figures, and then at the gentlemen's puzzled faces, with a faint smile.

"I half expected it," was his somewhat enigmatical comment, as he coolly seated himself at the table between them. "Pray tell me exactly what she has been saying."

With the physician's assistance, Mr. Bardine repeated the governess's extraordinary words as nearly *verbatim* as might be.

Without the slightest change of countenance, the detective produced a note-book and pencil.

"In order to carry out my plan," said he, "I shall have to prove my worthiness of employment practically. Pretense will not answer here. Pray dictate something for your publisher to me, Mr. Bardine."

"But, my dear sir, should Miss Valdemar insist on leaving—"

"She will not insist; I shall attend to that. Pray, proceed."

Mr. Bardine, additionally impressed by the man's quiet self-confidence, betook himself of a certain magazine article on political economy long in his literary workshop, and already not only well-digested, but rough-sketched.

He was, moreover, not unused to compose by dictation, having frequently employed a stenographic typewriter up to his wife's wearing illness and his consequent distraction from literary pursuit.

The proficiency of "Mr. Theophilus Gainsborough," the dilapidated scholar, was soon exemplified.

"You can be of great assistance to me, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bardine, at the close of the experiment, in which he had been so absorbed as to almost forget the real situation. "My literary work is very backward, and, if you can also show good references as to your private character—"

A warning "Hist!" from Dr. Cheatham called him back to the complication in hand, and Miss Valdemar was seen returning.

She was alone. A slight spot of red in either cheek betrayed her excitement, but her step and mien were quietly determined. It was evident that, having taken in the situation at a glance, it was her intention of throwing up her employment on the spot.

Mr. Bardine felt uncomfortable. Had Miss Valdemar's superlative attractiveness already rendered itself a necessity to his emotional nature? Dr. Cheatham was simply curious.

Before either of them could decide what to expect, however, the disguised detective had put away his notes, and was suavely advancing to meet her, battered bat in hand.

His back was, of course, toward them when the two met on the lawn, a few yards away, but Miss Valdemar was seen to come to a dead stop, and her flashing eyes to change from black to their less agreeable green and yellowish-gray variation. Then the detective seemed to be addressing a few words to her. Her face and eyes changed again, and, turning slowly, she retraced her steps at his side toward a clump of ornamental trees from which she had emerged the moment before.

"Mirabile dictu!" exclaimed the old physician, under his breath. "There is doubtless more to

come, but, what do you think of my inscrutable detective now, Bardine?"

"I hardly know what to think," was the reply. "But, let us wait."

In a few minutes, the governess and her odd companion were perceived approaching, apparently on excellent, if not altogether smiling, terms with each other.

She, however, looked at Mr. Bardine with a charming, half-penitent smile.

"I hope, Mr. Bardine," she said, "you accord to a woman her time-hallowed privilege of changing her mind without an explanation?"

"Oh, without a doubt," he answered, flushing slightly, and with a guilty sort of feeling that Agathe's image was growing less and less regrettably distinct in his mind under the bewitching fire of Miss Valdemar's black eyes.

"May I consistently ask you, then, to consider my parting words of twenty minutes ago as unsaid?"

"Certainly."

With a brilliant smile for the trio, she then floated away to rejoin Garda, who had again come in view at the top of the lawn.

"How, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you accomplish it?" the physician demanded of the detective, while Mr. Bardine evinced no less curiosity.

"I hope you will permit me to be reserved on that point, for the present," was the reply. "The lady may be innocent in this deplorable affair, and should have the benefit of every doubt till proved otherwise."

Dr. Cheatham seemed to swallow his disappointment with some difficulty, but Mr. Bardine said warmly:

"Mr. Falconbridge, such a sentiment does you honor. I cannot associate my wife's death with a suspicion of Miss Valdemar—I find it simply impossible to do so. The mystery, however, remains for your expertness to deal with."

"Am I to be Mr. Theophilus Gainsborough, then, and in the capacity of your amanuensis, with my home here at the grange?"

"By all means."

Three months later, when Dr. Cheatham visited Redwood, after a rather prolonged vacation in the Adirondacks and elsewhere, he was both troubled and disappointed to find that the mystery of Garda's strangely compelled instrumentality in Mrs. Bardine's death was apparently as far from solution as ever.

#### CHAPTER VII.

##### CLOGGED WHEELS.

THE old physician received his first intimation of this unsatisfactory state of affairs from Mr. Bardine's private secretary, the *pseudo* Mr. Theophilus Gainsborough, whom he chanced to find alone in the library, busily translating some recent stenographic notes into printer's copy.

"But, this is very remarkable!" exclaimed the doctor, not a little testily. "Why, I expected that by this time you would have the murderous hypnotizer fairly identified in your own mind, at all events!"

"That wouldn't be conclusive proof, though," replied the other, hardly looking up from his employment.

"True."

"There's no need of haste."

"But the fact remains that Agathe Bardine's murderer is still unavenged, man, and that every hour of delay may strengthen the perpetrator's security."

"Oh, the wheels of the secret investigation have not rolled backward, though temporarily clogged."

"But what clogs them?"

"I am pretty much alone in the case, for one thing."

"Alone! Why, Bardine himself—"

"Is almost as inimical to me as Miss Valdemar herself. In fact, I am here on a species of sufferance, through my real usefulness to him in his literary pursuits. That the secret of my disguise and purpose itself is not already in her possession is no fault of his, but of merely a misconception on her part."

The physician stared.

"What do you mean, my Sphinxian friend?"

Before replying, the detective glanced out of the open window, at which his writing-table was placed, and which commanded a charming vista of the varied and extensive grounds to the north, closing with a charming open glade of fine old forest trees, through which the warm early October sunshine was pouring its wavering and shaded brightness, tempered by an invigorating but still balmy morning breeze.

"The explanation is before us, and quite opportunely," he responded. "Follow the direction of my eyes, and draw your own conclusions."

As Dr. Cheatham complied, two figures, a man's and a woman's, were momentarily visible in the perspective, passing slowly across the glade. Their attitudes were earnestly confidential, if not lover-like; and they were quite distinctly the figures of Mr. Walsingham Bardine and Miss Madelaine Valdemar.

"The devil!" gasped the physician, when the figures had passed from view.

"Or the devil's hand maid." And the secretary half-resumed his employment, while passively keeping the subject of talk in hand.

"How long has this thing been going on?"

"Since soon after your last visit."

"Zounds! And Agathe not yet four months in her grave!"

"But little more than three."

"Look here, Falconbridge! you are satisfied in your own mind of this beautiful sorceress's guilt?"

"I am going to find out."

"To the deuce with your sphinxing! Are you, or are you not?"

"Yes, then."

"But, what have you been doing?"

"Much, though necessarily of a preliminary, feeling-my-way nature."

"Gad, man! but our Merlin is already in the Vivienesque toils. He'll marry her unexpectedly, and then where are we—where justice for the dead, retribution for the guilty, our psychological clincher for the illumination of science?"

"He will not go that far."

"No?"

"I think not. It is less love than infatuation, and, granting that the latter is all but complete, I know from my observation that there are saving moments, and not infrequent ones, when she inspires him with uneasiness, not to say downright repulsion."

"Slightly encouraging, at all events."

"If you could continue here with me, doctor," the detective went on after a pause, "it might help our case along greatly."

"And why can't I? I am already negotiating for the sale of my practice. Gad! I'd like nothing better than to study this mystery out with you for a week or two."

"That will be well. I am afraid you will have to invite yourself, though."

"So! is it come to as bad a pass as that?"

"Yes; Mr. Bardine is jealous of his infatuation, even while he fears it. He will secretly resent your possible interference therewith; while our fair schemer doubtless detests you only less than myself."

"I understand. But leave me to manage it. I like Bardine too well to give him up. By the way, are you still reticent as to the secret of your effecting that wonderful outward change in Miss Valdemar's primary hostility toward yourself?"

"I shall be confidential in due season."

"Still, you will say that you had met her before and in different circumstances?"

"That much, yes; I had."

"Is Bardine composing much with you nowadays?"

"A good deal. More than you might think, in fact. He is a writer of undeniab e talent; his literary work is steadily in demand; and I rather think his ambition absorbs much of his thoughts and dreams as are not engrossed by this fascination."

"But this would bring you in strict privacy with him almost daily."

"Of course, and which Miss Valdemar naturally dislikes. Well, she will find a way of cheating him out of even those confidences with me, or perhaps of sharing them, before long, as you will see."

Here the detective held up his hand, as Garda's soft youthful voice was heard exchanging some words with old Venus in a neighboring passage.

"You will have ocular proof in a moment," said he, in a low voice, "that I have at least effected something in this long delay."

Garda entered a moment later. She greeted the physician with her accustomed gentleness and simplicity, while it was speedily made manifest to him that between her and the private secretary there was already established that frank feeling of absolute trustfulness on one side and benignant fondness on the other, that is at times so agreeably observable as between a thoughtful, middle-aged man and an innocent, fresh-hearted girl.

But Dr. Cheatham was yet more agreeably surprised at the splendid change that had been effected in the whilom pensive, delicate, shrinkingly sensitive Garda, who was now in robust health, buoyantly though not exuberantly joyous, and with a color and fire of cheek and eyes to which she had long been a stranger.

"Why, come here and kiss me, my child!" he exclaimed, drawing her delightedly to him. "How superbly you are looking! What have you been doing with yourself to call such pretty roses into your cheeks?"

She good-naturedly submitted to the paternal salute demanded, and then laughed, a little confusedly perhaps, but bravely and openly, and with little or none of her former painful shyness.

"Oh, I don't know, doctor," she replied. "It is all from—from doing nothing with myself, I suppose. Ask Mr. Gainsborough there." And then she ran away to look for Miss Valdemar, of whom she seemed to be in quest.

"It is, I suspect, rather all from nothing being done to her by some one else," observed the detective, whereupon the doctor nodded thoughtfully.

"Ah, I understand. A wholesome immunity

from hypnotizing experiments, eh? And it is this much, at least, that your presence has brought about in the poor child's favor?"

"Exactly."

Here other voices were heard, and then Mr. Bardine entered, closely followed by Miss Valdemar, who had just been overheard inquiring of William about some package that she was expecting by Express.

Mr. Bardine was visibly confused at the unexpected meeting with his old friend, and though his greeting was cordial, it might have been a little more spontaneous; while Miss Valdemar's demeanor was unobtrusively pleased—the perfection of duplicity or genuine satisfaction, it would have been difficult to say which.

Even when Dr. Cheatham, after cursorily alluding to his camping-out experiences, coolly announced his willingness to stay at the grange for a fortnight or so, pending the sale of his practice, her face, which at that moment bent to some low-voiced query that Garda was putting to her, did not betray any chagrin; though she did look up a little observantly while Mr. Bardine was saying: "As long as you like, my dear doctor, and the longer the better, if you won't find it a little slow here," with a rather lame attempt at a hearty laugh.

Then, as the latter was about to turn them all out of the library on the plea that it was his morning hour for dictation with his amanuensis, the arrival of the governess's expected package was announced.

The detective threw the physician an expressive look.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### MISS VALDEMAR SCORES A POINT.

MISS VALDEMAR had glanced up a little timidly at the master of Redwood.

"Will you let me have the package opened in here?" she asked, with a charming hesitation of manner. "It—it is a sort of little surprise that I have ventured upon in—in the hope of pleasing, and perhaps being of use to you."

Mr. Bardine had already sunk into his favorite easy-chair at his detective's elbow, while the doctor was still in the room. His gesture in response implied reluctance of assent—for he was especially jealous of the privacy of the matutinal working-hour, in which he was wont to feel at his best for composition—mingled with some slight curiosity.

The latter sentiment increased, however, while the physician and secretary were becomingly observant, as William deftly took the package apart.

"Why, it's a typewriter!" exclaimed Mr. Bardine, with undeniable satisfaction, at last. "Bless me! a typewriter. But then you are not familiar with this sort of labor-saver, Gainsborough?"

The latter, to whom the shrewd trick of the governess was now plainly apparent, was obliged to reply in the negative, much to the satisfaction of the latter, who had also interrogated him with a quick, almost breathless look.

"I premised that the operating of a typewriter might not have been included in Mr. Gainsborough's curriculum," said Miss Valdemar, busily assisting the footman in mounting the machine. "Wait a little. Here we are! Take away this litter, William."

This being done, and the machine having been placed in thorough working order with remarkable facility by her own fair hands, she forthwith seated herself at the keys and ran them over with surprising rapidity of movement and dexterity of touch.

Mr. Bardine's method of composition was thus: He would dictate rapidly and with scarcely a break for half an hour. He would then devote himself to the revision of the long-hand transcriptions from the previous day's verbatim notes, while his stenographer was at work writing out the fresh-taken notes. And, as Mr. Bardine was a very painstaking, self-critical man, this revision would mostly present a very untidy mass of manuscript, mutilated, altered, interlined and in many sentences wholly rewritten, but still showing the author's finishing touch. The revisions were then left for the secretary to copy off in respectable form for the printer's use. When it is added that Mr. Bardine's handwriting was a particularly blind and illegible one, it will be seen that this last stage of the productive process was the most difficult that the amanuensis had to perform.

A considerable pile of this revised manuscript, presenting anything but an attractive appearance, was now lying on the secretary's table.

Miss Valdemar unceremoniously seized several of the sheets; clickety-click sounded the machine, as her beautiful fingers fairly flew, with scarcely a pause over the keys; and, in less than a third of the time it would have taken even a very rapid penman to transcribe the manuscript, she produced handsomely printed sheets, which, with a pretty simulation of timidity and suspense, she submitted to Mr. Bardine's critical inspection.

He looked over the sheets with unqualified pleasure and surprise.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed, while Garda, who had also ventured to remain, clapped her hands at the deftness of the experiment. "Not a

comma dropped, not a quotation misplaced, not an omission or a blur! It is perfect."

A happy blush was in Miss Valdemar's cheeks, a childishly gratified light in her superb eyes.

"Suppose you try dictating to me, too, sir," she suggested. "Mr. Gainsborough mustn't think, though," with a bright look toward the secretary, whose glumness of feeling was just perceptible in his impassive face, "that I could wish to take the bread out of his mouth, as the saying goes. But I would merely like to pit my typewriter against phonography as a test, you know."

"You will hardly be able to supplant Gainsborough in his chosen field, I think," said Mr. Bardine, with a smile, "and it will probably turn out that I can make work enough for both of you in your respective specialties. However, the test can be made. Now proceed."

He had already assumed his favorite dictating attitude, and now began to dictate with his accustomed rapidity.

On flew the white fingers over the queer-looking keys. Their manipulation was fairly electric now; the clickety-click was more of a continuous buzz than a gamut of articulations; and the operator's teeth were set, her whole manner suggestive of every faculty being urged to the top of its bent.

However, less than three minutes' test caused her to give over, and mask her disappointment in a nervous little laugh of defeat, while the secretary and physician exchanged a glance of relief.

"It was too much for me," laughed the governess. "Stenography retains the palm of superiority."

"Here you are!" said Mr. Bardine, handing her the entire mass of revisions. "And there need be no fear that we shall not keep my publishers busy among the three of us. Now, Mr. Gainsborough, it is your turn, and I shall begin over again."

Both Dr. Cheatham and Garda accepted this as a hint to withdraw.

The detective's prediction as to Miss Valdemar's scheming shrewdness had been verified. The confidential relations of master and man were thenceforth at an end, and the governess had scored her point.

Falconbridge and the physician had their next private conference in the middle of the afternoon, when the former's duties were over for the day, and it was understood that Mr. Bardine was visiting his publisher in the lower part of the city.

"How did Miss Valdemar do?" was the doctor's first query.

"Capitally. She will make one of the 'team' hereafter."

"So! then your private confabs with Bardine are terminated?"

"Yes; but she had no need to be jealous of them. Mr. Bardine has abstained from talking of the case altogether, of late."

"Why, what the deuce can the man be thinking of all the time?"

"The lady's beauty perhaps; but that remains to be seen. By the way, weren't you having some words with big William, our footman, a while ago?"

"Another transformation! I found the fellow unaccountably insolent, whereas he was the pink of Cockney obsequiousness—what I consider a paragon of the English man-servant."

"A sort of a Caliban now, eh?"

"I should say so!"

"Perhaps he has suffered a 'sea-change,' as Shakespeare would say."

"But the fellow can't exhibit this insolence to Bardine?"

"Hardly; though there is one other to whom he is noticeably and profoundly respectful."

"What! her ladyship-governess?"

"Of course."

"But she can't have been practicing her fascinations on that bulking ignoramus?"

"Less her fascinations than her art. She probably finds it expedient to keep her hand in, with a view to the fellow's possible instrumentality, now that she has been compelled to give poor little Garda a rest."

"Bless me! you refer to the hypnotizing power?"

"Yes."

"Drop your enigmatical vein, my dear Falconbridge; I ask it as a special favor."

"Come with me, and the mystery shall explain itself. It is the correct hour, I think."

They put on their hats, and the secretary detective forthwith led the way to a secluded portion of the grounds.

It was a small glade in a grove of fine old forest trees, some distance back of the larger and more open one that has been alluded to.

The detective signed his companion to follow in silence, and then began to climb the rear of a great mossy rock, whose perpendicular face gave against the side of a noble old oak, reaching up and spreading out grandly from the cup-shaped dingle below.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### A CIRCE AT HER WORK.

THE top of the rock was, in fact, almost completely hidden by the spreading upper and mid-

most branches of the oak, and a further surprise was awaiting the physician when he had, with some difficulty, followed his guide to this point.

This was in the shape of a long stout plank reaching firmly from the crest of the rock out into the very heart of the tree, where it was securely wedged and lashed into a convenient fork.

Without pausing an instant, but proceeding with added caution and stealthiness at every step, the secretary detective continued to lead the way out over the plank.

Having reached the bosom of the oak, he proceeded downward by a series of improvised steps that seemed to have been carefully prepared, with a due regard to the intricacies of the situation.

At last they found themselves comfortably perched on one of the lower branches, from which they obtained an excellent and but little interrupted bird's-eye view of the open ground below, with but slight risk of being discovered by even the keenest pair of eyes from underneath.

The space below was a singularly secluded spot, occupying, as it did, a narrow, rock-girt angle of the glade, and, moreover, a very lovely and romantic one. The ground was smooth and soft, luxurious seats could be found around the bottom of the knotted and gnarled trunk; and a bright little spring of water opened its furtive and shining eye amid a fringe of pretty ferns but a short distance away.

"We are in season," said the detective, in a cautious voice. "Our nymph is not yet visible."

"A Circean retreat, eh?"

"Yes."

"Is this tree-top business your own arrangement?"

"Yes; and accomplished with no little difficulty, I can tell you. As it is, you are the sole sharer of its secret."

"Thanks, I am sure! But how did you get wind of the chamber of mysteries below?"

"Chiefly by patient and persevering observation, aided by accident. Hush!"

She had entered the grotto.

Certainly no fabled nymph of old had seemed more bewitchingly and mysteriously beautiful to her breathless votaries.

There was even something classical in her attire; a loose-flowing robe of soft-clinging white material, and of the tea-gown pattern, filmy lace-bordered, coquettishly caught in at the hips, but falling a-loose at the back, and loopingly cinctured at the front with a carelessly-bowed sash of broad scarlet ribbon; high in the neck, with loose wide sleeves, affording ravishing glimpses of her perfect arms, white as alabaster, and a bunch of blood red geraniums at the breast; the entire draping of the lissom yet nobly robust figure being so suggestive of the silvan picturesque that one was disappointed with the charmingly-slipped foot which occasionally peeped into view, it should so obviously have been sandaled to be in keeping with the rest.

There was a silent look of expectancy and indolent power in this modern Circe's face and mien, as she slowly sunk upon the turf seat directly underneath the secret watchers in the tree, and seemed slowly and silently collecting herself, as if for the exertion of some occult and perhaps dangerous gift.

The woman's beauty was something superhuman.

Bulwarked by prejudice and case-hardened by his asceticism, the old physician none the less caught his breath, his eyes swam, and involuntarily the poetical description of the false Vivien's unholy triumph over the wise but infatuated Merlin came into his thought:

"The pale blood of the wizard at her touch  
Took gayer colors, like an opal warmed."

\* \* \* \* \*

For Merlin, overtalked and overworn,  
Had yielded, told her all the c<sup>r</sup> arm, and slept.  
Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm  
Of woven paces and of waving hands.  
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,  
And lost to life and use and name and fame.  
Then crying, 'I have made his glory mine!'  
And shrieking out, 'O, fool!' the sorceress leapt  
Adown the forest; and the thicket closed  
Behind her, and the forest echoed, 'Fool!'"

A touch of the detective's hand, together with a warning look, speedily recalled the doctor to his proper self.

He nodded and rubbed his eyes.

Without otherwise changing her indolent attitude, Madelaine had stretched forth her right hand and arm in the direction of the open wood with a commanding and powerful gesture.

Her features, however, had assumed the immobility of marble, with only the eyes—the one green, the other yellowish now—glittering, animated, fixed and dilating, like those of a serpent fascinating its prey, and yet with a far-away stillness in their absorbing gaze, suggestive of a compulsory exertion from some mysterious source wholly beyond or but partially under the control of her own volition.

"You missed something," whispered the detective in his companion's ear. "Her slightly

convulsed transition into this rapt state was worth your analysis."

"Well, I shall miss nothing more," was the reassuring response. "A hypnotizing sorceress in her den—ye gods!"

Miss Valdemar had maintained this interesting pose with the most absolute rigidity for two or three minutes, when there was the sound of a hurried, somewhat blundering approach toward the spot through the neighboring woods.

Then William, the footman—a man of vast and powerful frame, with a ruddy comeliness of the conventional flunkie type, save that the chin and mouth were weak—burst bare-headed into the oak-shadowed nook, as if drawn thither, half against his will, by a relentless and irresistible magnet.

His mouth was agape, his goggle-eyes fixed with the strained, absorbed look so familiar in somnambulism, and, as he came to a helpless, bewildered pause in the presence of his mesmerizer, he breathed laboredly and swayed awkwardly from side to side.

She held him thus, as if capriciously reveling in her strange power, until his painfully ludicrous utterance caused her to relinquish the spell.

"W'y 'ave you bordered me bout 'ere, mum?" he gasped, in mechanical remonstrance, his big hand wandering aimlessly over his short-cropped hair, while his immense tight-stockinged calves—for he was, as usual, in full livery—trembled piteously. "Hit was that himprudent, mum, as might 'ave hexposed us both, mum. Hi was a rubbin' bup of the silver, mum, and in another moment the butler might 'ave been 'elter-skelter hover and hover at my very 'eels, mum."

She dropped her hand, bursting into a low, thoroughly enjoyable laugh, the beautiful naturalness returning instantly to face, mien and eyes, and the charm was at an end.

"Oh, William, William!" she cried; "you are just too amusing. I fear you will be the death of me yet."

Then she drew back peremptorily, though still laughing, for, with a single bound, the fellow was on his knees at her feet, grasping one of her hands, and striving to devour it with his coarse kisses.

"Just one, mum—just one 'ug or one buss, or hi shall go stark, starin' hidiotic, mum!" he faltered, with real fierceness. "Remember w'at you 'inted, or leastwise w'at you implied, or sort of looked, or may be only—"

"Back, oat, fool, minion!" she was no longer laughing, and with a single airy but commanding pass of her disengaged hand, she sent him reeling and cringing backward, as by an electric shock. "I remember nothing, know nothing but that you are—unbearable!"

He was looking at her out of a pitiful struggle between rage, helplessness and bewilderment.

The enchantress smiled.

"Ah, you are yourself again, my dear giant?" She made another pass or two that seemed, first, to convulse him strangely, and then to invigorate him. "You are in sympathy with my will, my inclinations, my prejudices?"

"Yes, mum," replied the man, humbly.

## CHAPTER X.

### HYPNOTIC MYSTERIES.

THE woman's beauty was becoming stern and deadly.

"You must be cunning and cruel, with me—remorseless, malicious!" Another pass with that quivering right hand, from whose finger-tips electric sparks might have darted and flashed without causing much additional surprise. "So! that is better. What are you capable of at my suggestion?"

A terrible change had come over the Cockney. Hushed and mechanical, he stood like a rock, and yet as evidently the slave of her breath, an eager, expectant savagery looking out of his alert dreaminess, like a stealthy, tigerish glare peering through the jungle's bush and peace.

"Anythink, mum!" came his muffled response. "Oh, anythink, so it be to creep and steal onto somethink, and then to kill, kill, kill! Say somethink, mum, honly horder me, mum!"

"There is a re'l squirrel!" pointing. "Quick, ere it gets into a tree! After it, William, after it!"

He had caught sight of the innocent creature as she spoke, and was instantly in pursuit through the rocks and underbrush with a canine agility and cleverness hardly credible, in consideration of his cumbrous size and strength.

In a minute or two, he had captured the squirrel and trampled it into a shapeless mass at Miss Valdemar's feet.

"Bravely, bravely, my giant! Now, who is it that we hate, and mu-t thus crush and trample in our own good time?"

A wavering inward struggle on the part of the bewitched colossus, and then, "My master—Mr. Bardine!" was his breathless response.

"No, no! *Peste!*" with a strange laugh, while making some impatient passes; "you are not thoroughly controlled. William—you permit your own will to contest with mine. Now!" At her final pass, he shook his brawny arms silently aloft, the cunning and ferocity deepen-

ing in his face. "Who is it, my William, who is it that we must crush and destroy?"

"The physician."

"Stupid, no! *He* shall be otherwise provided for. Come!" A series of passes; "who is it, I say?"

"The secretary."

"Good!" clapping her hands; "the secretary, the detective, our arch-enemy in the dark! You have our secretary well in mind?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Keep him there. Look!" pointing to an elongated natural mound a few paces distant; "there he is asleep—unconscious of our deadly proximity. But softly, softly!"

It was evident that the suggested hallucination was complete in the mind of the hypnotizee.

He advanced crouching upon the mound, the incarnation of the secret midnight assassin stealing upon his prey.

"Stop! Never a step, never a motion, save as you feel the prompting thrill from me." He had paused, frozen in his malign attitude. "There! Now feel me, even though you see and hear me not."

She stepped completely out of his view, and then, merely by a series of concentrated will-passes, moved and controlled him like a marionette—now forward, as if ready to pounce upon his fancy-pictured victim with fierce strangling bands, then backward in a sort of murderous hesitation, but ever with his head dreamily bent to one side, as if expectant of the culminating impulse.

Again that strange low laugh from her beautiful lips, and then, suddenly drawing a small dagger from her bosom, she deftly tossed it within his reach, with a final and releasing gesture of her outstretched hand.

In an instant the "subject" had seized the weapon, and, springing upon the mossy mound with a sort of hoarse gasp or muffled roar, driven it again and again into the insensate clay in a species of nightmare frenzy.

The nervous tension of all this must have been no less severe upon the hypnotizer than upon the subject.

As she relinquished her spell upon him, and recovered the weapon, she threw herself, panting and pale, back upon her mossy seat, while the man confronted her with a dazed, wondering look, as of one suddenly and violently aroused from a drunken stupor by a dash of cold water on the head and face.

"Ah, you are so strong, it is such a trial for me!" she murmured, half-chidingly. "However, you improve, William, you improve, but very slowly."

"Wat 'ave I been a-doin', mum?" And once more his huge hands wandered gropingly over his crop-head.

"Only what I wished—let that satisfy you. Go now, my friend." She listlessly held out her hand. "That will do!" he was once more on his knees, devouring it with his coarse kisses, his whole frame trembling convulsively. "Be gone, I tell you—quick, this instant, or hope for nothing! Off!" And, as she cast him back, he sheepishly regained his feet, and went blundering off through the grove without another word.

The watchers from the branches over her head saw her face redden and then pale. Did she recognize the imminent danger to herself in this subtle game that she was playing such a brutish tool?

After a long, restful pause she swiftly jotted down some lines in a little red-bound book that she drew from her bosom, after which, having restored it to its place, she thoughtfully stretched forth her hand toward the glade once more.

Then Garda came running into the nook, the bushed, somnambulistic look just discernible in her sweet aspect, but also with a frightened, beseeching air.

"Oh, Madelaine, not again—not again!" she murmured, clasping her hands. "Please not again!"

"No, no; fear not, my love!" but even in partly encircling her, Miss Valdemar swept the frail figure with one of her commanding passes. "But just to see if you are still my own, my pet, my little dear. So!" Garda had grown rigid, hiding her face in the other's bosom. "What arrival at the Grange causes us this distress, my love?"

"Doctor Cheatham," was the scarcely audible response.

"What of this intermeddling doctor, my pet?" Another pass. "Speak! What of him?"

The bewitched face that Garda turned up to the light was the face of one possessed—of a child-fiend.

"He must die!" she muttered between her teeth. "Quick, Madelaine; say something—will me on!"

"No! yet, not yet!" and with her low laugh, Miss Valdemar kissed the distorted little face, while bringing its owner back to wondering naturalness with a single pass. "Come, my love; we are getting on, we are getting on!" And still smiling, she led the child away.

Not a word was exchanged by the detective and his companion until they had fairly got out of their oak-tree cleft, and were strolling side by side along one of the adjacent paths.

"How are you feeling by this time?" the secretary asked at last. "Getting over it a little, eh?"

"Still a little creepy, I am bound to confess," replied Cheatham, simulating a shudder with a quizzical air, and then shrugging his shoulders earnestly enough. "If the master of Redwood Grange could but have the faintest glimpse of what we have just seen—"

"It is not yet time, as I will explain to you," interposed the other. "But wait!"

They were interrupted by some one coming hurriedly toward them through the wood, from the direction of the homestead, who proved to be Mr. Bardine himself.

"Have you met Miss Valdemar hereabouts?" he asked, abruptly. "It is important that I should speak with her at once."

## CHAPTER XI.

### PASSAGES AT ARMS.

MR. BARDINE wore a troubled air, and seemed out of sorts generally.

It was presumable that he was newly arrived from the city, and most probably with some unexpected piece of intelligence.

He repeated his question with considerable abruptness.

"We chanced to catch a glimpse of Miss Valdemar but a short time since, sir," the pseudo-secretary took it upon himself to reply to the gentleman's abrupt inquiry. "She was strolling toward the house with Miss Garda."

Mr. Bardine was about to retrace his steps, but he hesitated, and then joined the doctor and Falconbridge.

"A strange report has accidentally reached me to-day with regard to Miss Valdemar," he said. "Perhaps I had better consult you about it, before confronting her with what I have heard."

The detective, who had been particularized, merely bowed, while Doctor Cheatham would have taken himself off, but that Mr. Bardine took him by the arm.

"I didn't mean for you to go, doctor," he continued. "Pray remain. This is something extraordinary that you may help us out of." Then, turning coldly to the detective. "Did you know anything of Madelaine's history before meeting her here, sir?" he asked.

"Pretty much everything," was the prompt response.

"Anything to—to her detriment?"

"That depends; but nothing particularly to her credit."

"Why have you not informed me of what you know? or perhaps thought you knew—for I am still unable to believe what has come to my ears to-day."

"You wouldn't let me," replied Falconbridge, bluntly. "I required but a short time to feel my way and be sure of my ground—being honestly anxious to give the suspected lady the benefit of every reasonable doubt until the last moment—and before that was over you had rendered yourself unapproachable on the subject."

"Unapproachable!"

"Exactly—by falling head over ears in love with the object of our suspicion, or yielding yourself a doating and infatuate victim to her toils, whichever you may feel the most complimentary."

"Sir, sir!"

"Oh, bosh, sir! If you are going to assume the master-and-man air with me, you can go to the devil on the spot! Not that you are not to pay me smartly for my *de facto* services as your secretary, let the case turn out as it may. Pray remember that, sir!"

Mr. Bardine controlled his temper with a forced laugh.

"You are less Sphinxian than blunt to-day, at least."

"Time enough for the change, too."

"Look here, I own to have somewhat lost sight of our original relations and object, as contracted for," said Mr. Bardine, apologetically. "And of course, in any event, Falconbridge, I mean to pay you for your services at your own valuation."

"No more on that point, then," returned the Sioux Detective, with his wonted urbanity.

"Of course, the secretary business can be dropped at your merest suggestion."

"But," hesitatingly, "suppose we should drop the detective business instead?"

"Impossible!" was the cool response.

Mr. Bardine started.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, in a low voice, facing the old physician no less than the detective. "Why impossible?"

"Because," replied Falconbridge, "apart from my own reputation in the matter, you, in merely giving me the case, have gone too far to back out."

"Too far?"

"Precisely," with sternness. "The fastening of your wife's murder, Mr. Bardine, upon the individual responsible therefor must not be permitted to lapse through criminal neglect or infatuation. I shall not permit it!"

Mr. Bardine's agitation returned. Without

replying at once, he sunk into a rustic seat they chanced to be passing, and looked up with mingled anger and bewilderment.

"Falconbridge is right, Walsingham," interposed Doctor Cheatham, with much gravity. "I hope you won't make the mistake of quarreling with the truth."

"With the truth, no; God forbid!" exclaimed the master of Redwood miserably. "But, good God, doctor! I cannot believe Madelaine Valdemar implicated in Agathe's death."

"We don't want to believe it any more than you do," continued the physician. "But you are perfectly aware of the suspicions that started the secret investigation, which you have since allowed to grow cold."

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" repeated Mr. Bardine, with a helplessness that was sufficiently significant of the painful struggle between his fascination and his sense of duty.

"Suppose you tell us the nature of the report that seems to have disturbed you, sir," suggested the detective, sympathetically. "Perhaps I am in a condition to confirm or refute it."

Mr. Bardine looked at him eagerly, as though catching at his last words.

"I shall do so," he said, collecting himself. "But first tell me this, Falconbridge; Of your own knowledge, are you aware of this lady having been married?"

"I am. She has been a widow (unless married in the interim, which is not probable) since—" he purposely paused.

"Since when?" cried Mr. Bardine, in an agony of suspense.

"Since her husband, Juan Valdemere (note the name) was hanged in Galveston, Texas, chiefly through my testimony, fifteen years ago this present month of September."

Mr. Bardine turned very pale.

"The worst, the very worst!" he muttered brokenly.

"You came across these facts to-day, then, in the city?"

"Yes, yes. I went to see my lawyer on business—of which more anon—that necessitated our consulting certain New Orleans newspaper files a good many years back. I am a Southerner, as you know, and my wife was a New Orleans Creole of excellent family.

"I may as well say at once that the object of my research was with regard to the parentage of my adopted child, Garda."

"We obtained her at two years of age of a young couple, in very hard luck, named Strathspey, under the impression that she was their orphaned niece. My present lawyer is also a Southerner, and drew up the papers for the child's absolute surrender to Agathe and myself, in New Orleans, fifteen years ago. A letter of inquiry, received from Strathspey a few days ago, revealed an unexpected complication. He frankly confessed to have lied with regard to the parentage of the child, whom he now admits having received in trust, but a few months previous to her adoption by us, from a young widow, then in some mysterious distress, subsequently declaring to her that the child had died on his hands of the yellow fever. Now, however, he learns that the young mother is somewhere in the North in well-to-do circumstances; and the rascal, who was glad enough to surrender the child to me for the merest trifles, purposes to hunt up Garda's own mother, and sell her the secret of the child's existence, probably at the highest figure he can work upon her maternal feelings to exact. Or he can be induced to forego this pious purpose, if I shall see fit to make it worth his while."

"Not to dwell too long upon the fellow's scoundrelism, he declares, without mentioning names, that he can prove his present position by referring to the record of the child's birth, as published in the New Orleans newspapers, seventeen years ago."

"Our examination of the back files referred to, was to see if we could alight upon a registered birth that would seem to conform with Garda's identity, and thus discover the name of her parents."

"This we have not yet succeeded in doing. But I accidentally came upon a sensational murder trial report, of a date two years later, that riveted my startled attention. It was the trial of the man you mention as having been subsequently convicted and executed. The name, 'Valdemere,' at first startled me. Then one of the reports included wood-cut portraits of the man murdered, the prisoner on trial, and the latter's wife. In the woman's picture—that of a mere girl, apparently, but distinguished by rare beauty, in spite of the coarseness of the drawing—I seemed to recognize a striking resemblance to what Madelaine Valdemar might have been at sixteen or seventeen."

"Did you read the reports?" demanded the detective, eagerly.

"No, no, no! Heavens! how could I? Hush! she is here!"

Madelaine was advancing from the direction of the house, with Garda, looking pale and distraught, hanging upon her arm.

"We have been looking for you everywhere," she said, gayly. "Do you not know there is danger of your dinner growing cold, gentlemen?"

## CHAPTER XII.

### MISS VALDEMAR'S COUNTER-PLOT.

MISS VALDEMAR's appearance had not been so sudden as to prevent the three men from successfully dissembling their thoughts, as they imagined, and Mr. Bardine managed to rise and offer her his arm with no perceptible change in his manner.

But she declined it with a smile, and pushed on with Garda through the grove, calling back pleasantly:

"Dinner need not wait for us, if it must for you; and if we are in time for the dessert, you should not complain."

They looked after her in silence for a moment, and then took their way in the direction of the house, Mr. Bardine merely saying, in a very troubled voice:

"No more of this painful subject for the present, gentlemen, I beg of you! We can resume it at our leisure."

"Certainly," replied the physician, with his best geniality, while the detective gravely nodded.

Miss Valdemar, on her part, had come to a pause with her companion in a clump of hemlocks but a short distance away, whence she had noted the retreating forms with an ominous face.

Then, turning peremptorily upon Garda, she exclaimed, almost harshly:

"We were interrupted. It will be necessary for you to return into your 'state,' in order to tell me the exact conversation you overheard."

"I do not want to," said Garda, standing off, half-defiantly.

"You did not use to resist me thus, girl. Come: this will never do."

But Garda even seized the outstretched hand before it could effect the stroking mesmeric pass that could enthrall her.

"I will not!" she cried. "At least, not unless you promise to tell me afterward what it is that you compel me to do when thus subjected to your will, and which is ever such an absolute blank to me."

"Why should you wish to know that?"

"I don't know. But it sometimes occurs to me, Madelaine, that you may abuse this mysterious power when I permit you to exert it so blindly upon me."

"Nonsense! I abuse you? Oh, Garda!"

"Oh, that is all very well! but I insist on being enlightened just the same, Madelaine."

"It is sometimes best to be ignorant, my dear."

"I prefer enlightenment. You might make me do something wrong, or even wicked, and I never be the wiser."

"What can have put such ridiculous suspicions in your little head?"

"I don't know. But I sometimes catch papa looking very strangely at me, just as if—as if I might have offended or troubled him, without my knowing anything about it. I have also surprised the same look in Doctor Cheatham's face; and perhaps Mr. Gainsborough's would show just such another, if it were not so wooden-like and impenetrable. It has been so ever since poor mamma's sudden death."

Miss Valdemar bit her lip, and there was a suggestion no less of uneasiness than of anger in her perfect face. But she was a serpent dissembler.

"Such a suspicion, and from you, Garda!" Tears were brimming in the glorious dark eyes. "My God! I wouldn't have suspected it of you."

"Don't cry, Madelaine! Indeed, indeed, I love you just as much as ever," and the soft girlish arms were about the governess's neck. "But is it quite exactly fair of you, dear Madelaine?"

"Fair! What mean you, child?"

"See how strong and healthy and hardy I have grown, and all, I am sure, because you stopped throwing me into 'states' for so long."

A steely look of impatient, cruel indifference leaped into Madelaine's eyes, which it was well for her that Garda did not see—a look which said, as plain as words themselves: "Fool and tool! what care I for your health or you—ay, or even for the stain of blood upon your unconscious hands—so long as you continue the mechanical instrument of my occult power?" But those deep eyes kept their secret, and it was in a sweet and temporizing voice with which she said:

"Your health shall not again suffer materially, my own. What! are you not as a younger sister to me?"

But Garda's accession of strength and individual will power was still to the front.

"Oh, that is very well, Madelaine," she persisted, stubbornly. "But try to love me yet more tenderly then—say, as your own daughter—supposing you to be old enough, and to have been married, and to have really had a daughter, you know—and then you won't even want to throw me into 'states' again. But, dear me! what is the matter, Madelaine?"

At the word 'daughter' the governess had started back, pallid and trembling.

"How dare you make such a suggestion?" she hoarsely exclaimed, wholly beside herself for the moment. "What! were you the angel child

whose baby face once smiled upon my life, do you imagine that I would thrust her thus remorselessly into the dream-guilt, the sleep-waking criminality, the—"

She stopped short, hardly less panic-stricken than her terrified girl listener.

"What have I been saying?" she murmured, forcing a laugh, and affecting to pass her hand over her brow with a bewildered air. "I do not feel exactly right in the head. Did I say anything errant or distressing, my dear?"

"Oh, yes; something terrible, something awful! I am afraid of you, Madelaine! I—I don't know what to think!" And Garda broke into sobs.

But Madelaine's arms were once more around her with ten-fold gentleness, and, between her reassuring kisses, the soothing, confidence-restoring words dripped from the witch-lips, like drops of a poison-balm, into the girl's startled ears.

"You must think nothing of what I said, my pet, my darling!" concluded the siren at last. "I am often subject to these strange hallucinations, though up to this time I have succeeded in concealing them from you. I to have had a child of my own—to have—what madness! You must forget it all, or you will break your poor Madelaine's heart, my sweet. Ah! that smile, faint as it is, I see forgives me. Come now, my precious! you will not continue stubborn—we will renew the dream—state just where it was interrupted?"

"No, no, no! Oh, not again, Madelaine!" And Garda looked up again with fresh protest.

"But look you, my darling; you shall have your wish. I promise sacredly to inform you afterward just exactly what you may say and do in the trance. Think of that; your curiosity shall be gratified at last. It is a promise."

Garda's face, as she again withdrew herself from those tender arms, was somewhat eager now in the midst of its doubt.

"Ah, but will you really do it—can I wholly trust you, Madelaine? You promise me faithfully that all shall not remain a blank to me as heretofore—that—that—"

The swift mesmeric passes were being made, and she was already in the "state."

"Are you, just as I will it, where you were when I had to recall you to my side?" demanded the hypnotizer.

"Yes."

"Where is that? Describe your situation and surroundings."

"I am crouched in the underbrush behind the spot where the three men are paused in earnest converse."

"They are your papa, Doctor Cheatham and Mr. Gainsborough?"

"Yes."

"You distinctly overhear them, as before."

"Yes."

"What are they saying?"

Here there followed, on the part of the tranced girl, a perfect reproduction of what had passed, delivered in the hushed dream-voice peculiar to the hypnotizee.

Madelaine Valdemar's fair brow knitted and darkened as she listened; and even when the tell-tale words had ceased she remained preoccupied and stern.

"No time is to be lost!" she murmured to herself. "Bardine is hopelessly lost to me if these marplots—But one night, and this very night, shall dispose of them! But wait! this man Strathspey? What should Bardine know of him? I must have further enlightenment here."

She turned again to Garda, now perfectly rigid and silent.

"Listen and look back once more!" she commanded. "There is a letter from a man named Strathspey?"

"Yes," vaguely. "But that part is indistinct. I cannot hear or know."

"You must! you must!"

"I cannot!"

"But I insist! What has your papa told them that the letter was about?"

The sleep-waker's head was bent strainingly to one side, but the hushed, anxious look in the pale little face remained unbrightened.

"Useless!" she murmured. "I can hear no more."

With a gesture of savage impatience, Miss Valdemar started back to the house.

"This night, this very night!" she muttered, an iron resolve hardening into her face. "A day's, an hour's delay may see me hopelessly baffled. Be the consequences what they may, to-night's work must clear my path!"

Suddenly remembering that she had left her subject unrelieved, she hurriedly retraced her steps, and, with a few swift passes, snapped the spell.

"Where am I?" murmured Garda, in the momentary bewilderment inherent to this phase of the experiment. "Ah, now I remember!" she seized Madelaine in her arms. "Your promise! What did I say and do in that blank, Madelaine?"

Miss Valdemar kissed her, and laughed pleasantly.

"What did you say and do, you dear, angelic little pet?" she repeated. "Why, just nothing but stand and rave so deliciously of the paradise

you were in and the lovely spirits you were with that it was just a treat to hear you. And yet you would dread the tranced condition that can disclose these spiritual beauties to your privileged inner sense!"

Garda placed her hand to her forehead.

"I might not object, if—if I could only recollect afterward," she murmured. "But then all is such a blank, with something like a haunting pain or terror in it, and I become so weak, so unstrung—"

She closed with a shrill, startling laugh, and the next instant she was on the ground, screaming, laughing and weeping convulsively.

If not exactly conscience-stricken, Miss Valdemar was not a little shocked and embarrassed.

Strange as it may seem, she had never seen a person in genuine hysterics, and, in addition to her sense of helplessness, the dusk was now rapidly deepening through the wood.

However, she succeeded in quieting the girl, and at last getting her home to bed; and it was with a composed sense of security and satisfaction that she joined the gentlemen at their dinner just as dessert was being brought on.

"Garda is not feeling very well this evening, and I am the bearer of her excuses," she said.

"Nothing serious, eh?" and Mr. Bardine looked up concernedly, while the interest of Dr. Cheatham and the secretary was more guarded.

"Oh, no; I think not. I remained with her till she fell asleep, and the night's rest will doubtless be all she requires."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### SIREN ARTS.

MADELAINE VALDEMAR had already formulated her deep-laid plot, by which she was resolved to snatch her personal security out of whatever that night could be made to evolve; and she was therefore determined, after perceiving intuitively that she herself had not again been under discussion thus far, that Mr. Bardine should not have the opportunity that night of renewing it at the suggestion of either the physician or the detective.

After that night, if all should go well with her, the personages last named would be, she fully intended, past further intermeddling with her affairs, no less than past praying for, as well.

Accordingly, never before had Madelaine been so essentially fascinating as upon that particular evening.

Her wit was in keeping with her amiability, her modest animation no less charming than the unexpected treasures of reading and general information that she unobtrusively disclosed, with the flattering suggestion of its being unconsciously evoked by one or another of her companions.

In spite of his criticalness, Dr. Cheatham was no less disarmed than his host, who was but too willingly enchanted afresh, while even the iron-lipped detective fell to contemplating the brilliant, beautiful and versatile creature with mingled wonder and doubt that such a dazzling personality might also embody in her composition such depths of guile and capability of crime.

In fact, for the first time since her residence at the Grange, Miss Valdemar, as if theretofore under some sort of restraint, either by her young pupil's presence or otherwise, displayed her pleasing arts to the full; and, as she was essentially what is known as a man's woman, in contradistinction to the sort that achieves its chief popularity with its own sex, she could not have been surer of appreciation than with the masculine trio of that evening.

There was none of the customary lingering over the wine on the part of the gentlemen, and when they had followed her to the drawing-room, she played and sung for them with sweet voluntariness, and so deliciously that it was little less than a symposium of refined and aesthetic enjoyment.

That her companions were all more or less discriminating lovers of music, with some knowledge of the art, was not the least element of success in this feast of the finer sensibilities which the fair lady so charmingly afforded.

"Do you consider that you play or sing best?" asked the master of Redwood.

She had just sung a melancholy operatic air to her own accompaniment, and he had been turning the music for her, the soft Italian words, as born from her melodious lips, still seeming to linger in the air with a "dying fall."

"I hardly know, sir," she replied, looking up absently into his bended face, and with her white bands idling dreamily along the keys. "I do my very best in both, and have never occasion," with a smile, "to plead a bad cold or other indisposition."

The room was—in sympathy with the nature of the entertainment—more dimly lighted than the adjoining hall upon which its two doors opened; the sultry night-air also coming in through the open front windows with a suggestion of relativity, while open glass doors at the rear revealed the interior of a large conservatory, likewise faintly lighted—a perfumed duskiness similarly in keeping with the music.

"Wasn't that last air from 'La Sonnam-

bula?'" inquired Dr. Cheatham, who was seated with the detective at a small buhl table supporting a reading-lamp, turned very low.

"Yes, doctor," and she slowly turned on the revolving seat so as to partly face the speaker. "It is the heroine's sleep-walking song."

"Ah, I remember now. A pure piece of dramatic license, though; for, of course, it could have had no foundation in fact."

"Why not?"

"A singing sleep-walker!"

"Well, but a singing sleep-waker, then?"

"You make a distinction?"

"Yes; and it certainly exists. By sleep-waking the German metaphysicians designate a species of waking and sentient trance, much more mysterious in its manifestations than the more mechanical phenomenon of somnambulism pure and simple. The two conditions are precisely similar in but one respect—that of uniform, though not invariable, forgetfulness on the part of the 'subject' as to what may have been experienced during the trance."

"To which class would you say the species of trance produced by hypnotism belongs?"

"To that of sleep-waking, though I do not pretend to much knowledge of hypnotism. Is it not but another name for mesmerism?"

Mr. Bardine betrayed an inclination to change the subject, so Dr. Cheatham, with just the opposite desire, hastened to reply:

"Not exactly, I think; and the name itself is an insufficient, if not a misleading one. The specific definition of hypnotic somnambulism would seem to be this: An irresponsible and forgettable sleep-agency, both produced and controlled by animal magnetism, on the part of the hypnotizer."

Miss Valdemar had fallen into a sort of absent reverie, in which her loveliness wore a certain set, pre-occupied look, as if she might be exerting, at a considerable distance, the animal magnetism or will-power alluded to; and, of course, she could have no suspicion of her hypnotizing secret, so to speak, being in the possession of the physician and the detective.

"Then must hypnotic somnambulism be a non-existence, in my opinion," she said, slowly. "Unlike sleep-walking, sleep-waking, or sleep-agency, as you aptly term it, is doubtless, I think, a wholly uncontrolled phenomenon—psychological or physiological, who shall say?—in which the sleep-waker can have no prompting from within—at least none of a mortal nature."

"Wouldn't it be much more agreeable, though," broke in Mr. Bardine, somewhat impatiently, "even if less scientific, for you to magnetize us afresh, Miss Madelaine, with your delicious music?"

For answer she pointed anxiously to one of the open doors, and they all stared in the same direction.

Garda, in her night-robe, was gliding spectrally along the adjoining hallway, in the sleep-walking trance.

Mr. Bardine, with a stern and mortified look, at once arose, but Miss Valdemar was before him.

"Leave this to me, sir, and pray summon Venus!" she murmured, darting into the hall, and arresting the somnambulist in her tender but firm embrace.

"Let me be!" said Garda, in the hushed dream voice. "I must not be interrupted. I must kill her, kill her, *kill her!*"

To the gentlemen, who had hurried to the doors, Madelaine lifted a look of divine compassion and embarrassment.

"Hush, my darling, my pet!" she whispered audibly, while still controlling the girl's painfully-mechanical movements to free herself. "Whom would you kill, pray?"

"Madelaine—my governess!" came the startling response. "She is making my papa love her better than he loves me. I hate her and must kill her!"

To the horrified expression that had come into Miss Valdemar's face there succeeded such painful blushes as could not but gain her the masculine sympathy of the moment. But the appearance of old Venus, and the latter's action, came as a sort of relief, though not in the happiest form.

"Go 'way from dat chile, you—drop dat chile, I sav!" exclaimed the old nurse, waddling hurriedly forward, and glaringly snatching the still spellbound (or fiend-ridden) girl from the governess's protecting arms. "You hear me now, you! I'se de one to take keer ob dis pore chile!"

And, with that, Venus incontinently marched the sleep-walker back up-stairs, with a Partisan shot back over her shoulder at the by this time petrified Madelaine.

"You will remain in Miss Garda's room with her, Venus," called Mr. Bardine after the nurse, "not neglecting to lock the room door, and place the key in your pocket."

"Trus' me for dat, Marse Bardine," came the answer back.

Mr. Bardine had quickly turned to Madelaine, now slowly recovering (to all appearances) from the nervous shock of it all.

"You mustn't mind Venus—I hope you'll try not to," he faltered, with a guilty remembrance of the tragic confidences, if not suspicions, that he had shared with the old nurse in Agathe's

death-chamber. "Should she again presume on her privilege in my household to the extent of annoying you?"

But Miss Valdemar interrupted him with a submissively indifferent gesture.

"Pray say no more, sir!" she said, with a faint smile. "Why should you disturb yourself over the mystifying relations of your dependents, one with another? Come!" forcing a laugh, and silencing an indignant refutation of her self-humbling words on his part with a look; "you demanded more music, and you shall have it."

Followed by the gentlemen she hurried back to the piano, and was at once reveling in its music in a sort of frenzy.

Mr. Bardine was once more hovering over her, lost to everything but her bewildering personality; but Dr. Cheatham and the detective exchanged glances that were perhaps equally dumfounded, though the latter's countenance was inscrutably impassive as was its wont.

Was it all a piece of incredibly clever acting, and had even the episode of Garda's somnambulistic appearance and utterance been prearranged by the hypnotizer—a profound and misleading *ruse* as a preliminary to some master-stroke preparing in the background?

Such was the unanswered query in the glance of each, concluding with a "What next?" from the one, and a "Let us be on our guard," on the part of the other.

If Madelaine had been simply charming before the sleep-walking interruption, she was now little less than ravishing—a radiant enigma, a Calypso of the warm perfume-freighted night, whose seductive mystery was as the emanation of her own weird, fascinating self.

A superb musician and singer, her repertory seemed without limit. Composition after composition, of delicious variety, flowed from her inspired touch, interspersed with rich bursts of song from her warbling lips, and these were diversified in turn by such *naïve* and sparkling little chats with her hearers as only to give an added novelty to the entertainment as a whole.

However, the hour was waxing late, and she presently desisted with her sweet laugh.

"What have I been thinking of to deprive you gentlemen of your coveted post-prandial cigars up to this unconscionable hour?" she exclaimed.

"I cry *peccavi*, and you shall enjoy them now on the piazza, while I indulge me in a hammock-dream in the moonlight."

And, in spite of their protests, she tripped away, and, when they sat down to their cigars on the piazza a few moments later, she had already occupied a hammock, suspended between two ornamental trees on the lawn, its soft swaying to and fro displaying her extended figure, matchless in its divine proportions and languid restfulness, now in the flooding moonlight and now in shadowy distinctness, apparently at the loving whim of the cradling and impassioned wind.

They watched her for some moments in silence, as might have chanced to Calypso's votaries in the enchanted isle, when snatching a momentary but not too-willing surcease from her enslaving smile.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

DOCTOR CHEATHAM was the first of the trio to venture a remark, and he did so in an instinctively guarded tone, which was thereupon adopted by his companions, notwithstanding that the space of moonlighted lawn between the piazza and Miss Valdemar's occupancy of the hammock was so great as to preclude more than the mere murmur of their conversation at the accustomed pitch reaching her ears, even if she were alert and listening, which did not seem likely.

Indeed, she would seem to have fallen speedily into a dreamful reverie or doze, judging by the closed-eyed placidity of her beautiful face, as now and then fluctuatingly betrayed in the moonshine by the oscillations of the hammock.

"A most remarkable and accomplished lady is Miss Valdemar!" observed the physician, warily particularizing the master of Redwood in his remark. "How strange that suspicion and mystery should attach themselves to such a brilliant and pleasing creature!"

Mr. Bardine knocked the ashes off his cigar with a sudden start, and then drew a long breath.

"Pooh! they don't—it isn't credible!" he replied, a little irritably. "At all events, let us not continue that subject to-night."

"As you please, of course, Walsingham. But the fact—whether enigmatical or not—is stubborn, and remains."

"But there is no fact, as yet, man—only surmise!"

"And danger," supplemented the doctor, dogmatically.

Mr. Bardine moved uneasily in his chair.

"Look here!" he said. "Apart from what the lady's antecedents may have been—and how many deserving and struggling women have been miserably entangled by fateful circumstances and associations over which they had no control, for that matter?—apart from this, I say, must we n't, in common justice to Madelaine,

drop the hypnotizing hypothesis, after this evening's astounding interruption?"

"Not necessarily."

"You are too implacable, not to say unjust, doctor!" Mr. Bardine turned appealingly to the detective. "What do you say, Falconbridge?"

"I say, for the present, wait!" was the laconic response.

"But, man alive! could Miss Valdemar—even though possessing the hypnotizing faculty to an uncommon degree, of which I, at least, have no proof—could she, I say, have had any possible agency in Garda's somnambulistic manifestation of this evening?"

As the detective continued to smoke in silence, Dr. Cheatham took it upon himself to reply:

"Yes, it is just possible."

"How? Why, wasn't Madelaine equally startled by the poor child's appearance?"

"Apparently, yes."

"Come, come; be fair. Wasn't she brilliantly entertaining us at the very moment of the interruption?"

"No, not at the very moment. She had fallen into a reverie, a fit of momentary abstraction, in which her mesmerizing power might have been exerted."

"What! to the extent of dragging the child out of bed, down-stairs, from her distant chamber, for our especial mystification?"

"I see no reason to doubt it, or to assign any limitations to a magnetic power so little understood and so puzzling to science as at present."

"Oh!"

"If such a power can be exerted at all, why not indefinitely?"

"But the monomania of this particular trance—the poor child's expressed impulse to kill Miss Valdemar herself!"

"Why couldn't the mania itself have been hypnotically impressed upon the subject's brain, no less than the mechanical impression, as imparted to her body?"

"All for our deeper mystification, as a matter of course!"

"Or for the disarming of our suspicions, to prepare the way for security in—in some profounder scheme, perhaps already planned and outlined."

"You are mercilessly unfair!" exclaimed Mr. Bardine, angrily. "As my guest, no less than my daughter's governess, the lady deserves my protection, and she shall have it. I shall listen to no more of this unmanly imputation of vile motives to a defenseless woman!"

Dr. Cheatham, naturally enough, was irritated in his turn.

"You should know me better, Walsingham," he replied, with some sharpness. "If you knew what Falconbridge and I know—if you had had the ocular proofs of this fascinating but dangerous woman's tremendous and unprincipled hypnotizing power, such as were afforded us only this very day—you would blush to have charged unmanly injustice upon me, your old friend!"

Mr. Bardine turned upon him quickly, his astounded look interrogating first one and then the other in the dim light of the shadowed veranda.

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean?" he demanded. "Ocular proofs!"

The physician, though regretting now the premature surrender of his secret, nodded a moody assent, while the detective, his arms folded over his breast, his half-consumed cigar between his teeth, remained motionless and irresponsive.

"But tell me what you saw," continued Mr. Bardine. "I insist on knowing!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort—at least not at present," Cheatham testily replied. "When you choose to complete your own story, as to what you discovered to-day of the lady's antecedents, perhaps I shall comply, but not before. Now I hear a clock striking twelve, and I am going to bed."

But the Sphinx Detective laid a restraining touch on his arm as he was about to rise, and also cautioned Mr. Bardine with a slight gesture.

The swaying hammock had come almost to a dead pause, showing the face of its lovely occupant, apparently fast asleep, placidly and with closed eyes partly upturned to the moonlight; and, moreover, a light, stealthy step had at that moment made itself audible in the silent and deserted hall-passage.

The next instant Garda issued into view, once more in the somnambulistic state, if, indeed, she had yet been aroused from the preceding one.

Her hand was clutching at something concealed in the white drapery of her long night-dress, and, she crossed the piazza and passed down the steps in her bare feet, with scarcely a sound, so hushed and mysterious was her gliding yet resolute step.

Straight for the occupant of the hammock did she move, and now the something in her clutch, catching a shimmering gleam from the moonlight, showed itself to be a dagger-blade.

There was something indescribably awful in the mechanical, set and yet murder-suggesting precision with which the delicate, phantom-like figure, as if the unconscious yet perfectly-con-

trolled instrument of some occult and fiendish intelligence out of space, out of time, out of the world, took its seemingly predestined way straight to the airily-suspended sleeper's unconscious form.

It suggested the bolt from an air-gun in ambuscade, betraying not its origin, but winging its deadly, soundless and sourceless errand true to its hidden aim; or, still better, the submarine torpedo, electrically controlled and guided from a rock-niched sea-beach nook, stealthily cleaving the blue silence of the under-sea, smoothly, inflexibly toward the stout and unsuspecting port-blockader's shadowy keel, whose disruption and effacement are its exclusive and predetermined end.

Mr. Bardine would have sprung forth to interpose, but that the detective's hand had suddenly closed upon his arm with a grip of iron. He would have shouted a horrified warning, but that the detective's voice, low-pitched, but with a new will-conquering inflection in it, commanded him to silence.

"Peace, or you are false to yourself!" was that stern command. "I guarantee that blood shall not flow. Now or never is the test of Madelaine's innocence or complicity in this thing."

As for Cheatham, he had not, as a matter of course, thought of interfering.

On swept the somnambulist-assassin, or, to all appearances, the mystically-urged to a murderous attempt!

The hammock was still motionless, its occupant still statue-like in her reposeful quietude.

Would there be no stir, no evasion under the uplifted knife? or was the unhappy sleep-waker in reality disassociated from Madelaine's occult agency in this phenomenal betrayal of a ferocious impulse so absolutely foreign to her normal self?

It was, as the detective had declared, a momentous test, involving not only the solution of the present enigma, but also, inferentially, the fixing of the true responsibility in the case of Agathe Bardine's mysterious death.

The three men awaited the *dénouement* in painful and breathless suspense.

Garda had now come to a pause over the bosom of the apparent sleeper, with her back to the piazza, only the moon-silvered forehead and lower person of Miss Valdemar being not shut out from view.

What is that? Is not the hammock beginning to sway again? Yes, surely, and from no touch of Garda's, nor from any additional wakening of the night-breeze, and just as the dreamer's poniard flashes aloft with surprising suddenness and determination.

It falls, but not into the bosom of the new Calypso!

The watchers start from their observation, and hurry down across the lawn.

A shriek had burst from Madelaine's lips, but the descending knife had only severed the hammock's head-support, and she had merely fallen rather heavily, but without material injury, to the turf.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AN EVENTFUL NIGHT (CONTINUED).

MISS VALDEMAR'S terror and consternation, if only simulated, as was now, indeed, most probable even to even Mr. Bardine himself, were simply perfection.

Nothing could have been better done.

She had sprung to her feet and caught Garda in her arms, after skillfully disarming her; and, as the three men came upon the scene, the somnambulist herself awoke with a wondering stare and a frightened, bewildered exclamation.

"Heavens! would you have murdered me, child—me?" screamed the governess. "Oh, yes! but your stupefied 'Where am I?' and 'What does it mean?' do not make the peril I have escaped any the less horrible. However, of course you are more unfortunate than responsible." She burst into a sob, which was perhaps less affected than genuine. "Ah, what am I saying and doing?"

She came to a faltering pause, for something in the men's faces must have told her that she had made her cast in vain; and Mr. Bardine, without vouchsafing a word of comment, had already drawn Garda to his breast, where she was softly trembling and sobbing away her consternation and bewilderment.

"What a very fortunate slumberer you can be on occasion, Miss Valdemar!" sneeringly suggested the physician. "The hammock swayed back so *very* opportunely! Ahem! Quite a miraculous interposition of—of something or other, surely!" And he coughed significantly behind his hand.

She gave him one withering glance before lowering her eyes, and murmuring, still with admirably-assumed trepidation:

"Thank you, sir! I recognize the narrowness of my escape, and am becomingly thankful, I hope. But the poor dear child!"

"If I remember rightly, Venus was left on guard," said the detective-secretary, with much abruptness. "Let no time be lost in investigating this affair—to such extent as may be

permissible." With a significant glance at Miss Valdemar as he led the way into the house.

The old nurse was found in a stupefied and dazed condition, seemingly petrified in her chair at the side of Garda's deserted couch, and directly between it and the door.

Her terrified asseverations as to her situation were similar in drift and intelligibility to those following upon her equally inadequate guardianship over the unfortunate Agathe Bardine, three months previously.

Without listening to them, Mr. Bardine motioned her peremptorily, though not unkindly, out of the room.

Then, opening the door communicating with Miss Valdemar's room, he signified by a polite, cold bow that that lady's retirement was desired; held it courteously open as she swept past him with a proudly submissive air, and then closed and double-locked it behind her.

Then, after Garda, who was still weeping quietly, had swept back into bed, he slightly turned up the small reading lamp by which the room was illuminated, and installed himself with a book in the easy-chair which old Venus had occupied.

"Mr. Gainsborough," he said, loudly enough to be heard in the adjoining room, "as my domestics have doubtless retired, may I ask you to afford Doctor Cheatham a selection from among the guest rooms? My post is at this spot until the breakfast hour. I wish you both a good-night."

And, as they quitted the room in silence, though the doctor ventured upon a commendatory nod, he gave them an impressive look, as much as to say:

"You perhaps know what to provide against as much or as little as I do in this house of mysteries; so be on your guard."

"Wait a moment," whispered the old physician, when once more in the lower hall with his companion. "I must procure a pitcher of ice-water somehow; it is my invariable warm-weather custom to have it within my reach upon retiring. Then let us see if you can't select a spare room for me not far from your own."

"That can be arranged," replied Falconbridge.

The latter had become comparatively familiar with the domestic arrangements of the large old house.

Accompanied by the doctor, he first attended to securing the front door, which as yet had remained opened; then obtained the ice-water and a glass from the buttery; and finally piloted his companion to a commodious guest-room, whose passage door was directly opposite the one belonging to the neat but less spacious quarters occupied by himself.

"One moment, Falconbridge," said Dr. Cheatham, glancing approvingly around the room, as the detective deposited the ice-water and one or two night-lamps he was carrying on a table near the head of the bed—a solid and comfortable old-time four-poster, without even a canopy and curtains having been omitted.

"Well?" and the detective stood expectant.

"Shall we lock our respective doors, or leave them wide open?"

"Leave them open," was the reply.

"Thank you; just my impression, too. Good-night!"

"Not this instant. A query or two, on my own part, if you have no objections."

"None whatever. Sit down," and, throwing off his coat, for the night continued sultry, the doctor dropped into a chair on his own account, though Falconbridge declined to imitate his example by a gesture.

"What I wish to know is this," the latter went on, thoughtfully: "You evidently believe in the reality—even in the possible illimitableness of this will-compelling hypnotizing or mesmeric power?"

"The deuce! who could doubt it, after seeing what we have seen?"

"Agreed, then; for so do I. It is doubtless your opinion, then, that certain organizations are easily impressible—easily made the submissive subjects or agents of this power, while others are so constituted as to successfully bid defiance even to its most vigorous manifestations?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You are a medical man and a scientist. Could you judge by physiological traits or characteristics whether a person might be so impressible or the reverse?"

"Generally speaking, and with the point to be decided well before me, I should say yes; I think I could. For instance, Garda, by her extreme and shrinking sensitiveness, would, I think, strike me as being singularly receptive of such a power, even without the facts in her case to my knowledge. So would old Venus, in spite of her corpulence and African density, doubtless because of an inferior mentality, with the proneness to superstition of her race. And a like susceptibility might be analogously argued in the case of the herculean footman, on grounds of mingled irresoluteness and covert animalism, as indicated by a study of his physiognomy. However, whether or not I should be able to so decide, in these latter instances,

before no less that after the facts that have come to our knowledge, I would not like to say. Perhaps not."

"Thanks. Now the question I want to get at—"

"Ah, I perceive your drift. It is whether Mr. Walsingham Bardine—now on guard at poor Garda's couch, but with only a thin door separating him from our hypnotizing sorceress—is so impressible or not."

"Exactly."

The old practitioner drew a long breath, and cocked his eye at his companion with the half-meditative and half-quizzical expression that was his sometime habit.

"My friend," said he, slightly lowering his voice, which had already been confidential of tone, "Mr. Walsingham is sufficiently self-resistant in his individuality. It isn't a constitutional susceptibility to hypnotizing spells that we need fear for him."

"What then?"

"Can you ask? The woman's beauty, of course. Shades of Olympus! it is little short of superhuman."

Falconbridge at once took up his night-lamp with a perfectly satisfied air.

"The gentleman is perfectly safe then," he said. "Good-night, doctor."

"What do you mean by his being 'safe'? Just the contrary, I should say."

"By no means. I watched him like a hawk. That spell was hopelessly snapped with the snapping of the hammock cord."

"Humph! Maybe you are right. I hope so."

"One question more. Do you believe in the clairvoyant gift being possible in conjunction with the hypnotizing power?"

"Decidedly not, sir. Clairvoyance is a nonexistent pretension—a humbug!"

"Humph!" commented the Sphinx Detective in his turn; "I only hope you are right, but I am by no means so sure of it. Good-night again."

Ten minutes later, Dr. Cheatham, having undressed, stepped across the passage, lamp in hand, and peeped into the detective's darkened room.

Falconbridge was already sound asleep.

"A good example for myself!" thought the doctor; and a few minutes later he too was fast asleep in bed.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### "IN THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT."

UPON being left alone at his self-appointed post of guardianship, Mr. Walsingham Bardine gave himself up to a host of crowding and not very agreeable reflections, paramount in which was what may be characterized as a grappling struggle between his judgment and his emotions—his truer manhood and the lingering, still haunting fascinations for him of the terribly beautiful and dangerous woman—yes, he must now acknowledge her as dangerous, if nothing worse—whose seductive personality was separated from his own by but that thin partition-wall and little door.

Rousing himself at last, he looked at Garda.

The innocent and exceptionally unfortunate child had speedily sunk into the statuesque, hardly respiratory slumber that comes of complete nervous prostration.

The master of Redwood loved the child as his very own. As he looked at the pale, delicate face partly turned so unconsciously and pathetically toward the lamp-light, and gently stroked the wan little hand that had listlessly escaped from under the coverlet, he remembered how Agathe, his murdered wife, had loved her too. Then there rose in his heart furiously loathing, resentful feelings against Madelaine Valdemar, this Lamia, or serpent-woman, of his domestic happiness, whose fatal entrance into the bosom of his household had brought nothing but death, mystery, haunting fears, disruptive elements! Then, somehow, he found himself thinking of her more leniently, and the recollections of her seductive attractions began to spring, pell-mell, into his imagination, like a rioting throng of Bacchantes amid the silence of a palace-hall in funereal mourning for its dear one dead.

He drew a long breath, made a commendable effort at the repression of these unworthy imaginings, and listened.

The house was buried in the deep silence of the night. The old physician and the detective had doubtless gone directly to bed, and the domestics were long since retired. Not a sound had issued from Miss Valdemar's room since she had disappeared therein, and he had fastened the communicating door.

Had she gone silently to bed, with her sense of defeat, or was she too watching out the silences of the night, plotting fresh treachery, fresh mystery, new fields for the exertion of her secret and will-compelling faculty?

He turned up the lamp yet higher, and opened the book which he had taken from among several on the table on first settling himself in the easy-chair.

Perversity of fate!

How could Garda have come by such a work? or was it, which was more likely, Miss Valdemar's?

It was Le Borlieu's *History of Hallucina-*

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sleeves and down the front, which completely and yet classically enveloped her statuesque figure, save that the glistening, exquisitely molded arms were partly revealed through the loose, flowing sleeves, while the snowy treasure of a bare foot, delicately small and veined, arched at the instep like a Castilian girl's, was just glimpsed beneath the embroidered hem of luxuriously falling and uncinctured gown.

Her abundant glossy black hair was down her back and partly over one shoulder in a single braid-like twist, or half-loosened knot. Her eyes were like burning stars, now steadfastly, brilliantly black, now the one of greenish, the other of yellowish, luster, but never constantly the same; just as some mysteriously blazing suns in the illimitable depths of the embosoming firmament of the night undergo those everlasting chromatic transformations and scintillations that are at once the despair and the fascination of astronomy. Her face was rapt in expression, and without color, save for a brilliant spot of red in either cheek, and except that the half-parted lips, across which one uplifted finger was laid with a cautioning gesture, wore a smile at once mocking and tender, and yet with something inexpressibly dangerous or evil in its very attractiveness.

Was it only part and parcel of the glamour, or was she really speaking to him, and he answering her?

"Walsingham," said Miss Valdemar, or this double of Miss Valdemar, "you are under my spell. Do you recognize and acknowledge this?"

"Yes; I can't help myself," he replied, with mechanical sullenness, and yet vainly struggling against the bestowal of looks that fairly devoured her beauty.

"Listen, then," she continued, composedly, riveting him afresh with her glowing eyes, after throwing a swift glance at the unconscious occupant of the couch. "It is a bold and fateful game that I must this night play out, and you must help me to success, or I am lost. Tell me this, Walsingham: What would you give to hear me say, 'I love you, and from this hour henceforth I shall be yours!' and to know, to feel that I spoke but the truth and meant the words in the inmost fiber of my heart?"

Almost without knowing how or why, he answered:

"I would give anything—anything in the wide world, not inconsistent with my manhood and my honor."

Her brow clouded, the smile on her lips growing more sinister, and she waved her hands toward him and the couch he guarded.

Mr. Bardine stared in astonishment, and then was startled beyond measure.

Madelaine had disappeared, but Garda was erect before him in the sleep-walking trance.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE.

If his life had depended on it, Mr. Bardine felt that he would have been unable to raise a finger or breathe an effective word in opposition to the strange and perhaps tragic drama that he was instinctively sure was preparing under his eyes.

Apart from his sympathetic interchange with the hypnotizing sorceress herself, he was as completely spellbound, the mere slave of her repressive will, as if petrified, body and brain, spirit and matter.

Garda had arisen silently, and was listening expectantly, as if for the mysterious will-command of her mentor, her head slightly inclined toward the communicating door, her wide dreamily purposeful eyes fixed upon the passage entrance, likewise close-fastened, as though mechanically anticipative of being impelled in that direction.

Mr. Bardine had also mechanically risen to his feet. But, far from any intent of interfering with her mission, whatever it might be, had even stepped back a pace or two, though distinctly in opposition to his secret but overmastered will, the better to afford her unimpeded movement, his eyes fastened wonderingly upon her hushed expectant face.

While thus regarding her, a something—whether a rustling movement, an added atmosphere of personality, or an instructive consciousness of the sorceress's gaze being again fastened upon him, he could not tell—caused him to look again toward the communicating door.

Madelaine had reappeared there as mysteriously as she had vanished (to think of the apparition as an hallucination, her double, or as anything less substantial or real than her terribly beautiful self, was simply an impossibility in the overmastered turmoil of his then condition—it can be characterized by no better name,) but in a somewhat different aspect.

Her hand was outstretched in a sort of menacing command, the evil suggestiveness in her smile had deepened, her face, her mien, her entire loveliness, was instinct with concentrative, unscrupulous, comprehensive and triumphing power.

It was the pose of a fallen angel—beautiful beyond mortals even in her perdition-ingulfing plunge—momentarily regaining vantage-ground upon some rock-shelf of the moaning pit-side of

the irretrievably lost, and holding in the hollow of her hand a lost but still talismanic fragment of her broken scepter, with which to challenge or destroy.

"Walsingham," murmured Madelaine, and there was a tinge of menace even in the rich melody of her voice, "you shall have from me the avowal that you crave, but without the cowardly conditions with which you said that you would accept of it. Listen: I love you, and from this hour henceforth I am yours!"

The sincerity of passion was in the avowal. Even then and there, had he possessed the power, he would have clasped her in a delirious embrace. But, he could only look and speak his gratification.

"A truce then to this witchery, Madelaine!" he exclaimed. "You shall be my wife, the sharer of my fortune and my heart; but first—there must be no glamouring, no more spells."

She shook her head.

"It must not, cannot be. The detective and the physician must first die. Otherwise, they will poison you against me in the future, as they have but recently attempted to do—nay, but for this woman-beauty of mine that so entrails you, would have succeeded in doing."

"Die!" he could echo the word with virtuous horror, and yet could do no more than speak. "Good God! can you plan murder thus complacently, Madelaine?"

"I can plan the removal of my enemies and stumbling-blocks with more than that—with positive relish, if you will." And she smiled.

"I cannot believe it! Is this really you that is confronting me, or some hideously-natured double or prototype projected out of your unconscious self?"

"No matter; it is myself, and that alone, that you shall possess as your reward. They must die!"

A sudden curiosity controlled him.

"Did my wife, Agathe Bardine, perish at your instance?" he hoarsely demanded.

There wasn't a particle of evasion or hesitancy in her response.

"Why, you must have known that for a truth, long since, and yet you have not shrunk from me!" she replied. "I loved you before her death as now, and therefore I—removed her from my path."

Woe for him! for why did he not shrink from her now, after this terrible avowal, save that he could not? He even found himself considering the matter argumentatively.

"It cannot be!" he exclaimed. "For did you not almost at the same moment attempt my life by the hand of this same unfortunate child? Her (your) dagger was at my throat directly following the poison-puncture that sealed Agathe's doom!"

A fleeting confusion, gone almost before perceived, crossed the hypnotizer's face.

"Had that blow fallen, it would have killed me, too—I would not have survived its fatal consequences to you a single hour," she composedly replied. "A few words can explain the seeming inconsistency of that attempt with my love for you."

"I hope so," incredulously.

"Yes. It was a hurried after-thought—a sort of frenzied despair, on my part. It suddenly occurred to me that you might at once divine my mysterious instrumentality in the prior deed—I was not then so panoplied in my self-security as now—and that then, with your admiration turned to loathing, you might be hopelessly lost to me. It seemed to me that I had erred—hopelessly overreached myself—I was in despair. If I could not possess your love, none other should—you should die. Maddened by the overhasty dread, I swept Garda from Agathe's couch, where her dream-mission was fulfilled, into your chamber. Thank God, she failed in that!"

He shuddered, and yet, strange as it seemed even to himself, he could not keep his eyes from devouring her beauty, nor his thoughts from a mere desire to continue imporizing with her in this purpose of fresh and two-fold murder.

"I accept this explanation, Madelaine," he said, with a credulity amazing to himself. "We love each other, and shall marry. But Doctor Cheatham and Falconbridge are my friends and guests. Harm must not come to them."

"Harm, no—death is not always a harm, but sometimes a release!"

She laughed. It was a musical, and yet a terrible, laugh.

Then she made a swift, imperative gesture, and Garda, moving like an eager automaton to the passage-door, began to unfasten it.

"The physician is your victim," murmured Madelaine, as if unconsciously voicing her instructions. "You will select from his pocket medicine-case the vial containing the greenish tincture. Half the contents in his pitcher of ice-water—he has not woken up for his first accustomed draught yet—will suffice. You will then expedite his waking, and secretly observe the result. Away! The giant footman" (she swept out another swift gesture) "is already launched, trance-wafted, on his appointed mission."

"Great God! this is purely horrible," gasped the muscle-fettered master of Redwood. "Madelaine, in the name of womanhood—humanity—

forbear! You will not, you cannot devote this innocent child to commit an assassination?"

Absorbed in her black art, she scarcely seemed to hear him.

"What is the girl to me?" she murmured absently. "No child of mine—not of yours either, for that matter."

But Garda was already in the passage, and, as she mechanically stole out of view, another dream-impelled figure, likewise on deadly purpose bent, stalked past the door, and was gone in her wake.

It was the giant Cockney, knife in hand, the detective's murderer in his heart.

Horrified beyond measure, Bardine could only remain speechless, powerless.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### SNAPPING THE SPELL.

For the first time since the inception of this hideously unreal-seeming scene, Mr. Bardine experienced palpable evidence of the sorceress's actual presence—or that which was the exact counterfeit of her presence.

She touched his arm.

"Let the doomed go," she murmured, giving him such a look of passion as might have won its way, but that her terrible smile was its companion. "The living are for us—for you and Walsingham—and we are for ourselves!"

As if her touch had in some slight measure relaxed her spell, Mr. Bardine shrank from her with a shudder; and at the same time he felt sure that the articulation of any human voice other than their own—oh, how he prayed for that alien voice!—must in somewise release him altogether from the nightmare powerlessness that was upon him.

"Call them back—call them back!" he managed to exclaim. "Do so—delay not, by my love for you, Madelaine! Otherwise, must I hold you as monster—murderess—henceforth evermore!"

She shook her head, the sternness hardening into her face.

"It cannot be, and you will forget this unmanning mercy in time, Walsingham. It will be as nothing in your reward. These men are implacable enemies. The security, not only of my past, but also of my future, imperatively demands—"

She started in turn, the sound of a voice—that of the colossal flunky, in a loud exclamation of bewilderment or fury—at that instant echoing from a distance through the dead silence of the house.

Bardine also heard, and savagely shook himself with a great cry of relief, as he again buried off her hand, which had again been laid on his arm.

The spell was snapped.

"Murderess! fiend!" he cried; "stand from before me"—she was barring the way between him and the passage—"or call back your dream-minions, or, as there is an avenging God in Heaven—"

He staggered back.

With a last look of furious reproach, not unmixed with despair, Madelaine, or the cheat of his senses that had acted as such, vanished before his eyes. He was alone!

In an instant he had caught up the lamp, and was rushing along the passage, with shouts of frenzied warning that echoed and re-echoed through the house.

A scuffling, struggling noise, mingled with hoarse, snarling voices, directed his flying steps to the detective's room.

It was in darkness, and the light that he suddenly flashed into the interior revealed the closing scene of a terrific struggle that had been going on in the gloom.

The giant footman, weaponless, and all but defeated in his murderous intent, was just going down under some final fist blows, that were being delivered with telling force and precision on the part of Falconbridge, who was seemingly inspired by a species of athletics little short of the supernatural. The furniture of the room was broken and displaced; the fallen dagger of the hypnotized bravo lay on the threshold; and the spots of blood that were visible here and there on the bed-clothes were as evidently not the detective's, for the footman was bleeding profusely, while keeping up his end of the struggle with such dazed and astounded looks as might come over a sound sleeper if suddenly dropped into a tub of water.

"Look to Cheatham's safety!" cried Falconbridge, upon recognizing the lamp-bearer. "Quick! his room is directly opposite. I am all right!" And then, with a last tremendous blow, he stretched out his adversary senseless, while falling back himself exhausted.

As Mr. Bardine turned, he perceived the old physician, pale but collected, standing in the opposite doorway, and Garda, just struggling out of her trance, with her wonted indications of terror and bewilderment, was in his strong but not ungentle clutch.

"Hurry this way, Walsingham, if you please!" said Cheatham. "I have somehow taken poison with my ice-water, and must find the antidote in my medicine-case."

Mr. Bardine hurried into the room, and, after

setting down the lamp, took the sobbing Garda soothingly into his arms.

At the same time, Dr. Cheatham, who was undressed, as a matter of course, found the medicine-case on the floor, and opened it with a *sang froid* that was highly commendable.

"Just as I thought by the taste!" he muttered. "The vial half-emptied, too! The deuce if I can have absorbed that quantity in my system—however, while there's life there's hope."

He coolly selected a vial, mixed its contents with some water, after carefully rinsing and wiping the glass, drank it, and then began dressing himself with an attempt at *nonchalance*, though visibly growing paler and more haggard every instant.

The passage was by this time thronged with frightened servants, though Mrs. Douglass, the housekeeper, who had headed the alarmed rush to the spot, had retained much of her self-possession, and was moreover something more than half-dressed.

At this juncture the detective also appeared on the threshold of his door. He had got into his clothes with a rapidity that would have been creditable to a New York fireman in a pinch, and, cool as the proverbial cucumber, was literally without a mark from his recent terrific struggle.

The master of Redwood rose to the occasion.

A few minutes later Garda had been consigned to the charge of the cook and the housemaid, who carried her off with them, while the butler and the coachman had taken like charge of William, with explicit instructions to abstain from harsh treatment while keeping him under guard, and Mr. Bardine, lamp in hand, was retracing his steps along the passage, accompanied by Dr. Cheatham, Falconbridge and the house-keeper.

Mention of the latter has been deferred to the present moment through the more pressing requirements of our story. Mrs. Marion Douglass, a tall, comely woman of thirty-five years, strong sea and lady-like attainments beyond her sphere in life, was a Scotch widow who had been housekeeper at Redwood for a number of years, with credit to herself and profit to the establishment. Furthermore, she was a reticent woman, with, of late, a secret admiration for the proprietor, of a strength and profundity that would doubtless have greatly surprised that gentleman had he suspected it, besides being abundantly complimentary to his *amour propre*, for all that the handsome, well-preserved woman was merely his housekeeper. It may merely be added that Mrs. Douglass's love and tenderness for her dead young mistress had only been equaled in intensity by her profound, abiding dislike and distrust of Garda's governess.

This was sufficiently suspected by Mr. Bardine, without his having ever perceived the slightest outward manifestation to that effect; but at the same time he had the fullest confidence in the housekeeper's true womanliness and sense of fairness.

This will explain the sentiment with which, upon coming to a pause before the door of Miss Valdemar's chamber, he turned to her, with much gravity, and said:

"Mrs. Douglass, the scenes of which you have just been a partial witness were preceded by a yet stranger one yonder in my daughter's room, in which Miss Valdemar (unless I was the victim of a hallucination utterly beyond precedent in my experience and knowledge) was the chief actor and colloquist together with myself. I wish you to proceed at once into her room, and report to these gentlemen and myself the condition—whether awake, sleeping, or counterfeiting sleep—in which you may find her—if, indeed, she is to be found there at all."

The entrance to Garda's room, adjoining, had remained open, so that all could see, while he was speaking, that the intercommunicating door was still closed and fastened.

There were indications that a light was dimly burning in the closed room occupied by the governess.

Having received her instructions with a silence suggestive of her divining much more than had been said, Mrs. Douglass submissively inclined her head, and laid her hand firmly upon the knob of the governess's door.

It proved to be unfastened. She entered, partly closing it behind her, and was seen to have promptly, as a preliminary step, increased the illumination of the interior by turning up the light.

Then there was a half-repressed exclamation, significant of commiseration no less than alarm, and she almost instantly reappeared, pale and disturbed.

"You had better enter at once, sir—and Doctor Cheatham especially," she said, hurriedly. "I fear that the young lady is dead!"

They then all crowded into the room, without ceremony.

Madelaine—in the modest but picturesque *deshabille* in which Mr. Bardine had last seen her, or what had seemed to be her—lay motionlessly extended upon the couch, her colorless face and closed eyelids partly upturned to the light, to all appearances perfectly lifeless.

Mr. Bardine set down the lamp he was carrying, and instinctively recoiled, pallid and horri-

fied. Dead! Could it be, and still so bewilderingly beautiful? Steeped to the eyes in mysterious, absolutely ruthless crime, as he more than suspected her of having been, he yet could not master a sense of forlornness and despair that the Destroyer should have snatched such a paragon of mortal loveliness to his chill and irresponsive embrace.

But, though the detective and the house-keeper had likewise stood back, mute and more or less deeply impressed, the old physician had lost not an instant— notwithstanding that it seemed to cause him unusual physical effort—in bustling to the side of the couch with a business-like professional air.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### REACTION.

DR. CHEATHAM raised his head after a critical examination of the motionless figure's pulse, and an application of his ear to the seemingly lifeless bosom.

As he did so, the skeptical expression with which he had hustled forward gave way to one of gravity and alertness, not unmixed with signs of repressed personal suffering.

"No possibility of counterfeiting here!" he said, brusquely. "Pulse low, heart-action regular, but hardly perceptible. Tremendous nervous, cerebral and magnetic exhaustion." With a significant look for Mr. Bardine and the detective. "Will get over it. Absolute rest, composure and immediate tonic treatment. Send for physician without delay. Mayhew (in the near neighborhood, I believe) is of high repute. As for me, I—I—"

He staggered to a chair, and sat down, pressing his hand to his stomach. His pallor and haggardness had grown ghastly.

"Gad! not quite enough of the antidote, I fancy," he continued, heroically, as the men both hurried to his side. "Quick—to my room! Don't forget—Dr. Mayhew—somewhere here in Morrisania—good man—"

He had fainted.

Three or four hours later Mr. Bardine and Falconbridge were finishing a lonely breakfast, at which much had been said, in the low and confidential tone consistent with the startling events of the night.

Mr. Bardine had duly unbosomed himself, with sufficient detail, as to his individual experience, and the associated mysteries had been discussed, with more silent thought than verbal comment on the part of the detective, as was the latter's custom.

"I shall do just as you may advise, Falconbridge, after turning the matter over and weight it thoroughly in your mind," said Mr. Bardine at last; and he pushed around his chair and thoughtfully crossed his legs, as a preliminary to enjoying his cigar with his *cafe au lait*.

"I always do that on the spot," was the detective's rejoinder, as he impassively imitated his host's example.

"What shall be our first step, then?"

"I shall tell you after hearing Doctor Mayhew's second report as to Miss Valdemar's condition. He is again up-stairs, I believe."

"Yes. Well, then, what shall you advise in case he reports the lady as rapidly improving?"

"To have her placed under close and constant guard, without an instant's delay."

"To what end—as a preliminary to what end?"

"As a preliminary to her speedy arrest" [Mr. Bardine made a dissenting gesture, which was quietly ignored] "on the formal charge of having contrived the murder of your wife; or to forcing a written and attested confession to that effect, as a guarantee of future powerlessness on her part pending—pending her ultimate disgrace and disqualification for the commission of further crime, in the interest of society at large, by the exposure of her iniquities, past and present, which I am preparing. After that—well, I, at least, shall have finished with her."

Mr. Bardine moved uneasily in his seat, though he could scarcely have anticipated a less Draconian response to his demand.

"Still, she is a woman," he ventured.

"But no less a social vampire—an unconscionable she-devil, according to your own showing—heartless, bold, unscrupulous and deadly!"

"Oh, the woman shall be kept under guard! Do not mistrust me as to that. But this exposure of her antecedents, that you have in mind?"

"I have John Strathspey's letter and address."

"Ahh!"

"Should he not have already quitted New Orleans for the North, on his threatened blackmailing venture—which is more than likely—I shall seek him there. On the other hand, I shall await his appearance hereabouts. Trust me for the details. Our chiefest care must be that Madelaine and the rascal should have no intimation of each other's whereabouts until I shall have tackled him first," and the Sphinxian detective indulged in about as much of a smile as often differentiated the iron placidity of his sturdy face.

Before Mr. Bardine could frame a reply the door opened, and Dr. Mayhew entered.

"What have you to report now, doctor?" inquired Mr. Bardine, with no little anxiety,

after the physician—a middle-aged, shrewd-faced practitioner, with a generally circumspect air of knowing what he did know pretty thoroughly—had declined to seat himself or even put down his hat and cane.

"Encouragement, on the whole," was the terse reply. "We are getting along. That is, your daughter will speedily be herself again, while my fellow-professional is, I am happy to say, out of immediate danger, though he will have to keep his bed for a number of days."

"And your other patient—Miss Valdemar?" The physician lost something of his encouraging air.

"The lady is once more conscious, but that is all," he replied, slowly. "I confess to being somewhat nonplussed by the nature of her prostration."

"Does it continue unimproved?"

"Yes; and is likely to last for perhaps days, though she will recuperate in time. But it is the exact nature of the prostration—its complicated nature—that puzzles me."

"Please explain, doctor."

"Certainly. Miss Valdemar's helplessness, then, suggests a complicated and simultaneous over-straining to their utmost tension of the constitutional faculties, so diverse in their respective functions, as to render her case almost, if not quite, exceptional in my experience. Only once has an analogous one come under my observation and treatment. It was the case of a so-called electrical or magnetic physician, as she called herself (I believe she also pretended to clairvoyance), and her exhaustion was similar to Miss Valdemar's, though nothing like so severe. If Miss Valdemar had been a woman of like gifts, or pretensions, I should say that she is suffering from some supreme over-exertion of the magnetic-volitional faculty, to the consequent debilitation of the brain and nerve centers."

He accompanied his last words by a keenly inquiring look.

"This man is either a charlatan or a shrewd analyst," thought Mr. Bardine to himself; though he contented himself with the enunciation of a hopeful commonplace word or two in reply.

"Allow me to ask a question or two, doctor," said the detective, who chanced to have a slight personal acquaintance with the physician.

"With pleasure, Mr. Falconbridge."

"Have you found Doctor Cheatham able and willing to converse with you in regard to last night's mishaps in this house?"

Dr. Mayhew looked, as he doubtless felt, surprised.

"Only so far as his own mishap is concerned," he replied. "I have merely understood from him that he had taken a poisonous extract by mistake, and have treated him accordingly. If there have been other mishaps, apart from the coincident demand for my services on the part of the little girl and Miss Valdemar, I am unaware of them."

"Then you have received no intimation as to any peculiar gifts or pretensions on the part of Miss Valdemar?"

"No, sir," promptly; "none whatever. The lady—apart from her beauty, which is sufficiently exceptional in itself—has merely impressed me as being a singularly strong character, and as possibly possessing animal magnetism in an uncommon degree. Hence my allusion, which seems to have been misconstrued."

"Oh, no, hardly that, doctor; and thank you, too. Only one or two more queries, if you will be so indulgent."

"At your pleasure, sir."

"Might Miss Valdemar's prostration, by any possibility, or wholly or in part, be feigned?"

"No, sir. It would not be possible."

"Will she, in your opinion, be able to quit her bed, without assistance, inside of twenty-four hours?"

"No, sir, most decidedly; nor within three times as many, save at hazard of her life."

As soon as Dr. Mayhew had gone, Mr. Bardine turned a look of fresh curiosity and inquiry upon his companion, which said: "Well, what are you going to do about it now?" as plainly as words could have done.

Falconbridge nodded composedly.

"Just as I anticipated," he calmly responded. "Put your guard on the woman without an instant's delay."

The master of Redwood dropped his cigar, and, placing his hands on the table, looked at his secretary-detective with undisguised astonishment.

"What?" he ejaculated; "after what has just been reported as to her condition?"

"Exactly. It is still my opinion that she is feigning, at least in part. Or perhaps this new doctor is already in league with her. Who can say? The woman is simply a devil, and there is no saying what her beauty and her arts may or may not accomplish. However, do as you please. Only pray understand this, Mr. Bardine, if my advice is not complied with, and, Miss Valdemar's room placed under constant and competent guard forthwith, I wash my hands of the consequences."

Mr. Bardine, to whom this seemed an excess of precaution little short of absurdity, strove to

argue the detective out of his notion, but in vain.

While he was still urging his views of the case to apparently deaf ears, and when Falconbridge had at last abruptly risen, with the gruff announcement that he would first pay a visit of inquiry to Dr. Cheatham's room, and then proceed down-town anent the Strathspey complication, troubling his head no longer about the subject in dispute, the butler, after a discreet knock, entered the room to admit the professional nurse who had already been engaged in Miss Valdemar's behalf.

In response to her look of inquiry, the butler directed her attention to Falconbridge in particular.

"If you please, sir," said the woman, addressing the latter, "my patient is to be humored in her demands, the doctor said. And she is very desirous for an immediate and private interview with you, sir."

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### AN OPEN QUESTION.

THE trained visage of the detective betrayed no sign of the surprise that he undoubtedly felt at this unexpected announcement, while Mr. Bardine looked as if he doubted the evidence of his senses.

"You are quite sure," the latter demanded of the nurse, "that it was Mr. Falconbridge your patient requested to speak with?"

The nurse, a decent and capable-appearing young woman, whose services had been hastily engaged at a neighboring hospital address directly following Dr. Mayhew's initial visit, and upon his recommendation, was quite sure that she had made no mistake in the request.

Miss Valdemar was so weak as not to be able to speak, save in a whisper, she said, but she had distinctly spoken the words, "Mr. Falconbridge the detective," as the gentleman she was anxious to converse with instantly and in strict privacy.

No more was to be said, and, as the detective silently followed the woman out of the room, Mr. Bardine merely announced that he could be found at Dr. Cheatham's bedside at the conclusion of the interview.

A moment later, the detective was alone in Madelaine Valdemar's presence.

Propped upon many pillows, her face was absolutely colorless, and yet of a transparent and not unhealthy look, wholly devoid of emaciation, while a hand and arm that were listlessly exposed were as of frozen wax. But, with the exception that her lips were red and her eyes of undiminished luster, her entire aspect was painfully suggestive of the last loveliness of a dying flower—the helplessness of exhaustion, complete and absolute.

She eyed her declared enemy gravely and without apparent resentment as he appeared before her, and then by a motion of the eyes, as though genuinely incapable of lifting so much as a finger, indicated that he should make sure of no one eavesdropping in the adjoining room—unoccurred now, since Garda was being nursed and accommodated elsewhere, and the communicating door of which was now open.

"No, Miss Valdemar, there is no one there," responded Falconbridge, after making the desired inspection. "We are entirely alone."

Then he seated himself in a chair directly facing her, in obedience to a similar indication.

She at once began speaking, in a low whisper, and yet with singular distinctness of articulation; and for all its suggestion of complete physical debility, there was a mournful melodiousness of modulation in her very whisper.

"You are not a fool, Falconbridge," she proceeded, calmly, "and therefore can't imagine that I wish to express remorse for my last night's attempt upon your life. Candidly, then, I deeply regret the failure of that attempt, through the blundering of my imperfect instrument. Nor am I less chagrined at knowing that Dr. Cheatham likewise escaped the doom I had designed for him."

"You were and are my enemies; henceforth it was my duty to myself, no less than my natural instinct, to destroy you. However, I failed, miserably, utterly failed, and there is an end; for, unfortunately, I shall not live long enough to make another attempt, or to enjoy the fruits of a better success, if that might not be again denied me."

Her eyes alone seconded her speech, and these seemed to study the effects of her devilish frankness upon her bearer, who, however, extraordinary as were the expressions, as falling from those lovely lips and in that soft, musical whisper, remained as blandly impassive as a smooth, water-polished stone in the sunshine.

"Why, then, you may ask yourself, have I sent for you?" she continued. "Surely not to bear you with weak and useless repinings at having failed to kill you?"

"No; I am not one of that sort, as you ought to know. Let me enlighten you, then."

"Falconbridge, it is because I am dying. Still, I may live long enough, though perhaps as a bed-ridden wretch, to obtain a certain boon at your hands, and for which I shall offer you certain satisfaction in return."

"My child—my little Inez!" for the first time

there was a perceptible quiver in the velvety voice, though instantly mastered. "You remember that I had a child, Falconbridge, and how lovely, how incomparably beautiful she was?"

He gravely nodded.

"Perhaps you do not know, however, that she—died. Yes; it was not long after the execution of my murderer-husband, Juan Valdemere, whose conviction you had chiefly secured, in your detective capacity. You caused yourself to be arrested on a fictitious charge, made friends with him in prison, and treacherously secured certain admissions from him under cover of that assumed friendship—admissions that subsequently hanged him."

"Well, I loved him, as you doubtless know, but somehow or other I have a heart that is not in the habit of breaking. A ghost of a smile flitted over her lips. "A very reprehensible and useless habit on the part of women's hearts, by the way, Falconbridge."

"But no matter. Directly after Valdemere's execution, I went off with my child. The little innocent! She could no longer be made to smile and crow in court, to stretch out her chubby hands toward her doom-marked father in the prisoner's seat, to enchant the jurors with her delicious ways, to create sympathy for the condemned with the lying reporters and the gaping spectators. I could only take her away with me into obscurity at last."

"However, the fates remained obdurate. I could not get along. I returned to my profession in Galveston, and might still have been a star, as before, on the variety stage, for my qualifications had not diminished, while, as I was still but seventeen, my personal attractions were developing new beauties every day. Indeed, my managers were rather under the impression that my otherwise unenviable notoriety, as a consequence of my Mexican husband's crimes, trial and execution, would yet further enhance my professional value."

"They had erred. It would not do—not even in Texas." Another ghost of a smile. "The fact of Juan Valdemere's crimes having included, inferentially, the assassination of my Gypsy mother and her protector—the man to whom I had owed my education and other advantages—with my alleged consent—some were so malicious as to use the word complicity—though that was not the charge on which he had been convicted—was too much for even the dulcet far Southwest. They applauded my performance, but hissed my reputation, were willing to feast their eyes upon my charms, while turning their backs with significant loathing upon my character."

"Moreover, I had never been popular with my professional associates. My indomitable chasteness disgusted the men, and my fondness for mesmerizing pranks had left me not a friend among the women."

"At one of my final performances, there was a regular riot—if such a thing as a regular irregularity can be said to exist—and on my account. But no matter; my engagement was summarily canceled, after a brief duration. I was friendless in the world, with my little Inez still little more than a child-in-arms."

She came to a pause, apparently through absolute exhaustion.

"Don't lose patience with me, Falconbridge," she murmured, panting. "It is only a momentary faintness; I shall soon be able to go on."

He merely nodded, and critically observed her under cover of his assumed indifference.

Was the exhaustion real or feigned? Was she acting or not? It still remained an open question, but he was content to wait.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

##### MADELAINE'S PROPOSITION.

MADELAINE presently proceeded, apparently with greater physical effort than at first, though this became less noticeable as she went on.

"Let me see; where was I? Oh, yes; stranded in Texas, with my child in my arms, and my profession up against me. I was less wise than now. I would not recognize the truth as the truth. Passionately as I loved my child, I conceived that it was my being a mother—in-umbered with the child, so to speak—that had handicapped my renewed race for stage favors, instead of the true cause, so patent to cooler heads and disinterested judgments."

"If I could put her away from me temporarily, I could change my name, go elsewhere, and, posing once more as a fresh innocent, a virgin aspirant to money and fame, my talents and growing beauty could not but win, and win largely. Or, that failing, I could strike out into new fields; and already the idea of becoming governess to some rich man's darling, with vague, ulterior chances and advantages, had invitingly presented itself to my imagination."

"So I falsely argued with myself. The thought of parting with my little girl was horrible, and yet I forced myself to the determination."

"Going back to New Orleans, to put my design in execution, fortune (fatal fortune, as the event proved) led me to the discovery of a couple so situated as to further my end in view by ra-

lieving me of the child. Their name was Strathspey. They were poor, but hard-working (the man, John Strathspey, was a carpenter), and with a good reputation for honesty and sobriety. Moreover, they were childless, and more than willing to take my little girl, then two years old, for such a modest consideration as I could bind myself should be forthcoming in quarterly payments, with some certainty of meeting the obligation."

"The agony of that parting is long since buried in the past. Suffice it to say that the severance was effected."

"Of my manner of life thereafter no mention need be made. After a year of separation from my child, during which I was obliged to content myself with only desultory information as to her welfare from Strathspey, I found myself in a remote frontier town, almost at the opposite end of the continent."

"Here an incident occurred which suddenly opened my eyes to unsuspected misery. My maid and companion, a woman in whom I had reposed the completest trust, was arrested for theft. Previous to committing suicide in jail, she made a written confession of many theretofore unsuspected sins, which came into my possession. Among them was a disclosure that struck me dumb. I had intrusted her with expressing to Strathspey the quarterly payments for my child's support. She confessed to having secretly converted the inclosures to her own use, after satisfying me with forged Express Company receipts."

"What had become of my child? I knew the Strathspeys to be poor, and doubtless mercenary, as the hard consequence of poverty; and coupled with this thought, there was the terrifying fact that I had received no word from them for many months. To add to my distress, I was in exceptionally hard strait at the time—practically penniless in a new, raw and unsympathetic community, where *saure qui peut* was the universal doctrine of the hour."

"By disposing of my best gowns, I managed to raise the money to carry me in hot haste back to New Orleans, but with little or nothing to spare."

"The blow that awaited me there was too terrible to more than glance at, even from this distant day. I arrived at the close of a yellow fever epidemic that had swept my child, my adored Inez, together with uncounted others, including Strathspey's wife, into an untimely grave. So, at least, Strathspey—who had become shiftless and taken to drink—inform me. I was furiously desperate, and would not at first believe him. I accused him of having, far more likely, sold my child for her beauty, to reimburse himself for the care and nursing, which that vile woman's cupidity had hindered me from liquidating, in accordance with my agreement. For my little Inez ab, she was beautiful, though not robust—beautiful as an angel, fresh from Mother Nature's master-mold—though favoring neither myself nor her father, who, as you may remember, was a superbly handsome man after a peculiar type, brigand and criminal as he was. Something more than the madness of my bereavement, perhaps, impelled me to make this doubtless unjust charge; for it struck me that it was only after Strathspey learned that I was still struggling and poor that he seemed to grow circumstantial in his account of my child's death. This did not escape me. I charge him not only with having sold my child, but with still knowing of her whereabouts, which he would doubtless not hesitate to reveal to me if I were only rich enough to make the revelation worth his while."

"Before defending himself against these wild charges—which he lost little time in doing—the man made a singular remark. He looked at me in mingled pity and derision, and said harshly—perhaps in irony, as I have since accepted the words: 'Well, you are good looking enough to raise a thousand dollars in short order. Do so, and see what wonderful information I can dispose of to you for that sum!' Then, probably from perceiving my increased distress—for, whatever he may have known of my former misfortunes and associations, he must have known my woman's honor to be unassailable—he at once went into such details, backed by a burial permit containing my child's and his wife's names, for they seemed to have died in the one day, that I was at last reluctantly convinced of his truth."

"Yet another hardship was mine in that fatal connection. It would have been some mournful amelioration of my bereavement if I could have knelt at my lost little one's grave and bedewed it with my tears. But even this poor consolation was not for me. With countless other poverty-cursed victims, she found a pauper's burial in the corpse-choked trenches of the Potter's Field. Identification, and removal to a single grave in some respectable cemetery, were possible, but only at a heavy expense, and I was penniless."

Madelaine's whispering voice had grown broken, and the tears were helplessly welling from her eyes, but she scarcely paused.

"I am now come to the bargain I would strike with you, Falconbridge," she continued.

"Fourteen years have passed—no matter how—since that dreadful information lacerated my life, and the wound is bleeding yet, for my Inez is still in her pauper grave. The hope of providing my child with a decent separate burial, and a becoming monument, has haunted me ever since, and—no matter how variously defeated—is still unfulfilled."

"Falconbridge, I am dying, and this is what I would have you do for me after my death. I have four hundred dollars in the Bowery Savings Bank. Out of this money, which I propose to make over to you in due time, I would have you expend as small a sum as is consistent with decency in providing for my own burial in a Woodlawn plot; the rest to be spent in recovering my child's remains and giving them interment at my side. If anything remains to you from the original sum, it shall be yours. In return for your promise to perform these services, I propose to afford you enlightenment on an old mystery, whose solution must be dear to your heart."

Her pause here indicated that her story was at an end, and her hearer promptly took advantage of the opportunity to ask:

"Do you refer to the uncleared-up mystery connected with that murder of the miserly Scotchman, Saunders, for which Juan Valdemere was hanged?"

"I do. Juan obtained but an inconsiderable sum of ready money by that crime."

"But there were valuable papers, supposed to authenticate Saunders as the heir-at-law to a valuable estate in Inverness. Those had disappeared."

"True; and by their continued disappearance a distant relative succeeded to the Scotch estate, while the murdered miser's poor, abandoned wife became a pauper exile from her native land. You are unaware of even her identity."

"That is true."

"Those vanished documents in your possession would enable you to right a great wrong, a desire which has long been one of the unfulfilled dreams of your detective career. They would enable you to place your hand upon the defrauded widow—"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes; to place your hand upon the defrauded widow, and assure her sole right in the Inverness property, now enjoyed by another."

"Well, what of the papers?"

"They are in my possession, that is all."

The detective narrowly controlled a start of astonished gratification, for he instinctively felt that this much, at least, was the truth.

"Well?" he queried.

"I see that you believe me. Let me tell you further, that I know the woman."

"Why have you never communicated these facts to her, then? Since you are looking out for bargains, she could well afford to make it worth your while."

"Am I not aware of that? A personal antipathy for the woman has thus far held me back. What I might have intended for the future is now at naught, since I am on my dying bed."

"And your proposition?"

"Is to make over these papers to you, upon your solemnly assuming the obligation I have demanded."

"When shall the exchange, if agreed to by me, be completed?"

"To-morrow morning, or yet sooner, should I become satisfied that I shall not live so long as that. You will be notified. Do you consent?"

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### ENIGMAS.

THE detective remained for a moment buried in thought, and then replied:

"No; I do not consent. At least, not yet—not until you shall have satisfied me on certain points, not clear at present."

"Set them before me at once," said the apparently dying beauty.

"Why, then, should your selection fall upon me in this important matter—me, your ancient enemy and marplot, as one might say—unless it were your intention to trick or undo me?"

"In the first place, pray consider the desperation of my situation, and then ask yourself to what other man I could available make my proposition."

"To Mr. Bardine, for instance. Your beauty—your smile could make the past as nothing and him as your slave at any moment."

"You mistake. You do not or will not recognize the fact that I am a dying woman. Neither smiles nor beauty are of avail with a moribund. Besides, I honestly love Walsingham Bardine. You may not believe me, but it is the truth. And can you not see that I could not leave my dying request in his hands without making the same disclosures as to my unhappy past that I have made to you? A fine way to win back his sympathy and confidence, truly!"

"How can you expect me to believe that you love a man, against whose sleeping breast you have at one time directed the knife of assassination?"

"Ask him, if you choose, and he will tell you. The seeming inconsistency has been satisfactorily explained to him."

"We'll consider Bardine out of the question, then, for the sake of argument."

"Good, then! To whom else, pray, is it strange that I do not apply in my quandary, instead of to yourself?—to Doctor Cheatham?"

"No; but to this man Strathspey."

"I have often thought of communicating with him, I must confess, but have as often been deterred by an intuitive distrust of the man. Besides, it is too late now for that, as you must acknowledge. While I still hate you, Falconbridge, and would cheerfully destroy you, if once more in the fullness of my health and strength—the daring insolence of my beauty, as you might call it—I know you to be trustworthy, and therefore yield to the necessity that drives me to you in this hard stress, as my last and only resort. Come now; confess that I have successfully disposed of your objections on this one doubtful point."

"Very well, then. There is yet another, more insuperable, I am afraid."

"What is it?"

"Ob, a general point! I find it difficult to believe in the truth of anything you say or do—in your present claim that you are a dying woman, though you certainly look it—in your seeming helplessness—and especially that you have those papers in your possession, or can at once indicate the hard-used widow of the murdered miser. Your claim as to this last seems especially preposterous."

"What can I say to do away with this wholesale distrust of me, Falconbridge? Something, at all events. Let me try. In the first place, as to the genuineness of my slowly-dying condition, what has that new physician reported to Bardine and yourself? But no matter. If he has said that I shall get over it, he is simply in the dark as to the extent of the over-strain to which I subjected myself—a fatal imprudence. Listen: I simply overestimated my hypnotizing powers, and the consequence is to be my death. More than once before had I successfully willed the thoughts and actions of two subject-instruments at one and the same time—as last night, when both Garda and great William were thus simultaneously set in motion by my magnetism on the separate missions of vengeance that so unhappily failed—unhappily for me—although the two-fold exertion had always left me so shaken and weak that I should have accepted it as a warning against repeating the attempt. But never before had I also, in conjunction with this two-fold exertion, projected my second or dual being out of my body, while I stood here, myself entranced—as was necessary for my control of Mr. Bardine, then on guard in the adjoining room. It was simple madness, and has left me in the wrecked, drained condition that you behold. Man! man!—But words are perhaps useless, if seeing is no longer believing in your mental economy. Now as to my truth respecting those vanished papers and that vanished woman, whom they can make or unmake, accordingly as they are brought to light or remain in obscurity. A single breath can convince you on that point."

"How?" exclaimed Falconbridge, profoundly impressed in spite of himself by the strange and hushed vehemence of Madelaine's words and manner, so to speak.

"By giving you the widow's assumed name, and at once putting you in communication with her."

"Her name, then! tell it me."

A pause, in which her eloquent eyes seemed striving to read his very soul in a sort of agony of hesitation, and then:

"Swear to me first, that, without my permission, you will make no further use of it than merely to satisfy yourself of my veracity in the matter."

"Good! you have my pledged word. Where and who is the woman?"

"Here in this house—Mrs. Douglass, the house-keeper."

The detective's impassive dumbness, which momentarily ensued, was tantamount to what a start or exclamation of supreme astonishment would have been in another.

"It is enough," he said at last. "Conditional upon my proving this by the interchange of a few words with the woman you name, you can count on the compact you demand."

"Thanks! Leave me now."

The long-bent silken lashes and ivory lids sunk wearily over the glorious eyes. She lay as lie the dead, without the slightest breathing being perceptible.

He threw a last look at her, a look of wonder and perplexity, and then softly quitted the room.

The hired nurse was in waiting just outside.

"What is your name, please?" asked the detective, after carefully closing the door behind him.

"Amanda Phillips, sir," was the composed reply.

"You are experienced in nursing invalids?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will Miss Valdemar recover, think you?"

"I must not answer, sir. The physician says she will."

"But what do you think?"

"Sir—"

"I insist!"

"I think not. With Miss Valdemar herself, I believe her to be slowly dying."

He gravely bowed, and she disappeared into the room.

Fate would have it that the detective should meet Mrs. Douglass on his way to rejoin Mr. Bardine in Dr. Cheatham's room.

"Madam, I would respectfully beg the exchange of a few words in confidence with you," he said.

The woman looked surprised, but gravely inclined her head in acquiescence.

"Pray understand, ma'm, that whatever I shall ask is for your own welfare, and shall be regarded by me in the strictest confidence."

"You are Mr. Bardine's secretary?" in renewed surprise.

"I am also a detective officer."

"Oh! pray proceed, sir."

"Are you not Mrs. Saunders, of Inverness?"

"No, sir."

"What was your husband's name?"

"Saunders Douglass."

"Ah! and he died when and where?"

"In New Orleans, some fifteen or more years ago."

"Under the assumed surname of Saunders?"

"Yes; he was murdered."

The detective bowed.

"Thank you for this expression of confidence, ma'm. Your husband's inheritance may yet come into your possession."

And with that he hurried away, leaving her rooted to the spot.

Strange as it may seem, Falconbridge's first words, after confiding to Mr. Bardine and the old physician such of his interview with Madelaine as he deemed was permissible on honorable grounds, were words of fault-finding.

"You have not yet placed Miss Valdemar's room under guard, sir, I observe," he said to Mr. Bardine. "Is it to be done or not?"

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### STRATHSPEY.

MR. BARDINE looked up at the detective with an astonishment, which was shared, at least in part, by Dr. Cheatham.

The latter was in bed, looking considerably improved, though still a very sick man; but his mind was active, and his interest in the mystery under consideration in no way abated.

"Why, Falconbridge, this is simple madness!" exclaimed Mr. Bardine.

"Is it, in lead?"

"According to your own report, the lady is apparently in a dying condition."

"Apparently, yes."

"You are incorrigible! Wait, however; you shall be humored."

And Mr. Bardine—who would have given more than he dared confess to himself to have been included in Falconbridge's interview with Miss Valdemar, and had not yet gotten over his disappointment—strode out of the room, biting his lip.

"Your wise precautions have been strictly followed, Falconbridge," he rather sarcastically announced upon his return, ten minutes later on. "The dying lady is, and shall continue until her funeral obsequies are in order, under strong guard."

The detective looked relieved, but merely bowed his acknowledgments.

He then announced his intention to go downtown, anent his inquiries as to the man Strathspey's whereabouts, and quitted the room, after saying that his mission would in all probability consume the remainder of the day.

He smiled at perceiving the butler—a dignified and rotund individual, Jacob Smith by name—installed in an easy-chair directly before Miss Valdemar's door, and half-blocking the passage.

"What are your instructions, Jacob?" he asked.

"To remain just here, sir, until relieved by John Henry, the coachman," was the reply.

Later on, the detective telegraphed for his desired information to a fellow professional in New Orleans; and was ultimately informed that John Strathspey had disappeared from his residence three days before, and was presumed to have left the city.

It was in the dusk of the evening when he returned to Redwood Grange.

A seedy-looking middle-aged man was wistfully eying the front of the house from the roadway.

"So!" thought the detective; and, instead of directly entering the house, he passed on, observing the stranger narrowly.

Approaching his own little cottage, not a great distance away, he gave a signal, and his odd little assistant—with whom he had been in daily communication since taking up his residence at the Grange—made his appearance.

"What policeman is on this beat at this hour, Tommy?"

"Officer Kelly."

"Be at the Grange gate with him inside of ten minutes. At a signal from me, admit him quietly into the small room, just off the main hall to the left, and communicating with the library, there to await further instructions, and

to listen for all he is worth. Here is the front door latch-key."

The boy pocketed the proffered key, and darted away.

When the detective again came in view of the Grange the stranger had so far progressed in his curiosity as to be seen mounting the steps of the piazza.

Falconbridge waited till he saw him admitted into the house, and then followed, after first assuring himself that Tommy Dodd was approaching the gate in the policeman's company.

Entering the library, he found the stranger seated there, awaiting Mr. Bardine's appearance.

"I am Mr. Bardine's secretary," politely observed the detective, after pushing the communicating door slightly ajar, as if to cool off the air of the room, which was somewhat oppressive. "Have you sent him your name by the servant, sir?"

The man presented a mean, rather dissipated aspect, whose prevailing air was a combination of insolent assurance and covert uneasiness.

"No, sir," he replied. "But I mentioned my business as important. He'll come, I think."

"Scarcely, I am afraid, without your name being first announced. My employer is a gentleman of somewhat punctilious ways. I think I had better tell him that you are here, Mr. Strathspey."

The man started.

"You see that your visit is in a measure anticipated," continued the detective, smiling. "Don't be uneasy, however."

He stepped back into the passage, closing the door behind him, just as Mr. Bardine was on the point of entering.

"Strathspey is in there," whispered Falconbridge. "Watch me for your cue, keep your temper, whatever he may propose, and leave the rest to me."

Mr. Bardine nodded, and the detective, after following him back into the library, quietly lighted the gas, and was quickly absorbed at his desk, to all appearances, with scarcely a thought outside of the manuscripts upon which he was ostensibly engaged.

"So you are Mr. Strathspey, eh?" was Mr. Bardine's greeting of his visitor. "Ob, keep your seat. Of course, I was expecting the honor of your personal acquaintance, sooner or later, after reading your letter. You seem slightly flustered, Mr. Strathspey; but the weather is warm, and that's a fact."

"Who's flustered? I ain't!" dissented the visitor, with an uneasy swagger. "But I'm glad to find my visit anticipated, sir, for all that. It'll save some explanations, like enough. I suppose you remember me, Mr. Bardine, though it's fifteen long years since we first and last met?"

"I do remember you, sir," coldly.

Here there was a light, familiar tap on the door (much to Falconbridge's secret surprise, for he was not aware of Garda being so far recovered as to be about the house again), and then the young girl entered.

"What is it, my love?" inquired Mr. Bardine, affectionately, as she came up to him confidentially, after a shy look at the visitor.

"If you please, papa!" in a whisper sufficiently loud enough to be overheard.

"Well, my dear?"

"Venus is now watching by Doctor Cheatham, who has fallen into a refreshing sleep."

"Well?"

"So may I go in just once to see poor Madelaine, papa? Miss Phillips, the hired nurse, says she is very low, and—"

"Certainly not—at least not at present. I will see you about it later on. Run along now, my child."

As Garda rather dejectedly quitted the room, John Strathspey, upon whom nothing had been lost, struck the arm of his chair with his fist.

"The very same identical kid!" he exclaimed, exultingly. "Lord bless me! to think how she has growed up like a young ash saplin', and I to know her again first off!"

Mr. Bardine caught a warning look from the detective, which enabled him to keep his rising temper in check.

"Your recognition is not at fault, Strathspey," he quietly assented. "Garda is the child I adopted out of your keeping fifteen years ago."

"I should say so, but her name wasn't Garda then. We called her Nessie, as short for Inez."

"That is nothing."

"Oh, no, I s'pose not! Grown purty fond of the girl by this time, eh, both Mrs. Bardine and yourself?"

"Mrs. Bardine is dead, sir."

"By Jupiter, I beg your pardon, sir! So is Mrs. Strathspey, by the way—long ago."

"Suppose you come to the point with me at once, Mr. Strathspey."

"All right. Short and sharp is the word, Mr. Bardine. I had no right to make over the young girl to you. She had been left in our charge by her mother, a beautiful and unfortunate young widow—herself little more than a child—who would now, I fancy, if she could be made to suspect the truth—"

"That much is understood. Who is the real

mother of the child, and where is she to be found?"

The answer, prompt and exultant, was no less a surprise, at least in part, to the detective than it was startling to Mr. Bardine.

"She's here in this house, I understand; and her name is, or was, Madelaine Valdemere."

Mr. Bardine kept his composure very creditably; and presently it was in a perfectly steady voice that he continued the conversation, in obedience to a significant sign on the part of the detective.

"Well, sir, you have the advantage of me," he admitted. "To the point! What do you want?"

"Five thousand dollars, on the nail, to keep my mouth shut!"

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall let out the secret to the gal's mother on the spot; after which, I fancy, it'll be good-bye to the child of your adoption, Mr. Bardine!"

"This seems wonderfully like a levying of black-mail, sir."

"That's just about the size of it," with increased insolence. "What are you going to do about it?"

Just this!" unexpectedly interposed the *pseudo*-secretary, rapping sharply on his desk. "Arrest that man, Mr. Officer!" to the policeman, who entered from the adjoining room, in obedience to the signal, accompanied by Tommy Dodd. "You doubtless overheard sufficient of the rascal's demand to substantiate the charge of attempting black-mail, which will be formally made against him by Mr. Bardine in due season?"

"I did, sir," was the response. And the astounded Strathspey, crestfallen and discomfited, was forthwith led away in custody.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### SUSPENSE.

WHEN they were left alone in the library Mr. Bardine, after a moment's hesitation, grasped the detective's hand with a cordiality he did not often betray.

"You seem to see and provide for everything," he said.

"Don't mention it," replied Falconbridge, with his habitual modesty. "Strathspey is safely jugged till you can see your way clearly as to what is best to do, at all events. I'll go with you to make the necessary charge against him directly after dinner, and after that we can have his case deferred indefinitely, to suit our own convenience."

"I understand all that. But"—Mr. Bardine strove to control his agitation—"this shocking revelation as to Madelaine being Garda's mother!"

"It will be sufficiently shocking to the former, should she ever come to realize the truth—that is all. To have attempted to make a murderer of her own child! S'death!"

"You have suspected this truth?"

"Almost from the first; and, since my interview of this morning with Madelaine, I have been certain of it."

And, without any further reservation, the detective gave the master of Redwood a complete account of that extraordinary interview, together with the compact he had virtually agreed to.

Mr. Bardine was becomingly astounded, as a matter of course, more especially now concerning the disclosure with regard to Mrs. Douglass, the housekeeper.

"To think of that worthy woman's affairs having all along been interwoven with these mysteries!" he exclaimed. "It is no less gratifying than astonishing."

"It was so to me," the detective said, "or I would not have completed the bargain with Madelaine, depend upon it."

"But what shall you do?"

"Let us first see what she will do—die, get well, or disappear."

"Disappear!"

"Yes."

"Come, come; the lady isn't a magician, in any event."

"No! Well, we shall see."

"Peste! you can't mean it. But, look here, Falconbridge, it would just kill me to give up Garda."

"Be easy on that score. Madelaine sha'n't know the secret unless I am convinced that she is at death's door, and with the missing papers to reinstate Mrs. Douglass in her rights in my possession."

"That is well."

Here the housekeeper herself appeared to say that dinner would be served in a few moments, and that the doctor wished to make a fresh report in the interim.

"Doctor Mayhew can come right in here, ma'm," said Mr. Bardine; and then, after she had withdrawn, he observed: "A handsome and lady-like woman that, Falconbridge!"

"If you have just discovered it," said the detective, boldly, "it is but tardy justice to the lady, on your part, no less than your misfortune."

"What do you mean?"

"She secretly admires you, or I am no judge

of women; she would make an admirable mistress of Redwood Grange; and even a dim recognition of this in the past might have been a sufficient safeguard against the fascinations of the most seductive *intriguante* this side of Tophet."

Mr. Bardine frowned a little.

"Humph!" he muttered; "you are plain-spoken, my friend."

But he was thoughtful, nevertheless, and just here Dr. Mayhew entered the library.

"Miss Valdemar's case still defies prediction as to the result," he gravely reported. "But she is at last in a profound natural sleep, whose termination will doubtless decide her fate. I shall call here again before midnight, by which time we should know the best or the worst."

"In what way will her slumber determine her fate?" demanded Mr. Bardine.

"In just so far as it shall prove restorative or debilitating. If the former, she will recover; if the latter, she is beyond hope."

The physician then took his departure, after politely declining to remain to dinner.

Considerably later on, after Mr. Bardine had made his formal charge against Strathspey, and placed the case in the hands of his lawyer with an assurance from the latter that the Crescent City adventurer and his story would remain bottled and corked against inconvenient effervescence for some days to come, if necessary, there was another consultation of three in Dr. Cheatham's room, pending the next and anxiously-awaited report of Dr. Mayhew concerning Miss Valdemar's condition.

She was said by the hired nurse, Miss Phillips, to be still "sleeping like a dead woman."

Dr. Cheatham, though still keeping his bed, was improving steadily the effects of the poison having been thoroughly counteracted, though he was very weak. But he was clear-minded and chatty, and, having by this time also received the detective's unreserved confidence regarding Miss Valdemar's disclosures and admissions, was perhaps even more deeply interested in the outcome of her case than his companions.

"What a pity that I can't be treating her!" he exclaimed at last, after the subject, in all its complicated bearings, had been pretty thoroughly discussed. "Mayhew is doubtless doing his best, but"—he hesitated—"well, I am an older man and consequently colder-blooded than he."

"But what has that to do with it?" inquired Mr. Bardine.

"Well, it might guarantee me against the faintest possibility of being imposed upon by the patient. That is all."

"The deuce! you are as bad as Falconbridge, man. Even he comes from his interview with the lady, admitting that she betrays every natural symptom of approaching dissolution—Mayhew evidently comes to the same professional conclusion at last—and yet he insists on having a guard set over her door, as at the cell-entrance of a condemned felon!"

"It's as well to be on the safe side," was the dry response.

"Could you manage to get up and dress yourself, with our assistance?" Mr. Bardine abruptly demanded.

"I think so, at a pinch," surprisedly. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because, whatever Mayhew's next report, and he ought to be here shortly"—Mr. Bardine consulted his watch—"Falconbridge and I shall insist on having a look at the patient, and it would be an additional satisfaction to have you along with us."

"Gad! I'll be with you." And the old professional weakly but resolutely struggled out of bed. "Lend a hand at amateur valet-service, then, you two!"

This was done, and he seemed to gather both strength and cheeriness as his toilette progressed.

Here there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Bardine himself opened it, to be confronted by Mrs. Douglass.

"Has Dr. Mayhew arrived, ma'm?" he asked.

The housekeeper's comely face wore a troubled look.

"Yes, sir, and he is now in Miss Valdemar's room," was her reply. "But it isn't wholly to announce his arrival that I am here. Miss Garda is seeming so strange again, sir."

"My daughter!"

"Yes, sir. I had persuaded her to retire early—she has occupied my room with me since last night's occurrences, as you are probably aware—and shortly after that was sleeping calmly and sweetly. It occurred to me to look in upon her again just now, and I was alarmed to perceive a change."

Mr. Bardine exchanged a painfully significant look with Cheatham and Falconbridge, who were now also at the door.

"What sort of a change?" he asked.

"I hardly know, but—but it might be of the sort that precedes the—the sleep-walking fit. Hadn't you better come, sir?"

They all accompanied her without a moment's delay.

Garda's sleep seemed to be fitfully broken by unpleasant dreams. Her hands would close and unclose convulsively, and her innocent brow

was frequently knitted, while her youthful figure, though in a natural attitude, would occasionally assume a strained and rigid aspect.

Dr. Cheatham gently turned her over on her side, however, and without awaking, she quickly grew quiescent and composed.

"Perhaps only a nightmare," he observed, in a low voice, "perhaps—something extraneous!" And he accompanied the words with a look.

"She must not be left alone again," said Mr. Bardine. "No, ma'm," to the housekeeper; "we shall want you with us. Is the cook or the housemaid best to be trusted as a watch-nurse?"

"The housemaid is less likely to fall asleep, though both are trustworthy," was the reply. "I shall fetch her at once."

This was accordingly done, and after the servant had been duly set on guard and cautioned, the group made their way to Miss Valdemar's room.

The butler was once more doing sentry-duty there, having been duly relieved by the coachman during the afternoon.

They waited till the doctor made his appearance, which he did a few minutes later, issuing from the chamber of mystery with a step and mien suggestive of approaching death.

He seemed surprised at the appearance of the committee of four, so to speak, but was apparently relieved on perceiving Dr. Cheatham, whose hand he grasped.

"She is awake," he whispered, "and the end is doubtless near. It is my impression that it will come before daybreak, though the invalid insists that she will last it out twenty-four hours longer. A remarkable woman! Oh, no; there can be no objection to your entering, all of you."

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### DENOUEMENT.

SAVE that there was an absolute absence of emaciation, Madelaine lay as one at the point of death—"a perfect form in perfect rest"—motionless, tranquil, beautiful as monumental alabaster—and oh, with such an appealing suggestion of helplessness!

Even Mrs. Douglass, for all of her distrust and dislike, experienced a feeling of profound and womanly commiseration; and Mr. Bardine was visibly affected, though he seemed half angry with himself at being so.

Only the magnificent eyes of the seeming moribund were eloquent at first—eloquent with surprise, it would seem, at the number of the arrivals at her bedside. Then the gravely beautiful lips—they had wholly lost their ravishing carnation by this time, however—parted with a faint smile, and she began to speak in that velvety and distinct whisper with which the detective had, on his part, already grown familiar.

But it was now a yet more wonderful whisper than the. It seemed to issue without articulative exertion, and to come from nowhere. One might have thought it the voice of a parting soul, perhaps just lingering on the mysterious threshold between mortality and the unknown.

"In spite of Doctor Mayhew's opinion to the contrary—physicians never say such a thing to their patients, but I can see it in his face," that melodious and far away whisper went on to say, with sweet fluency. "I shall be able to say good-bye to you all to-morrow. After that, the end!—Falconbridge!" The detective advanced a step. "You have not forgotten or changed your mind?"

"Not in any respect," was his impassive reply.

"Good! Then let me see you first, and alone, to-morrow." A strange weariness was coming into the voice. "Why is not Garda here with you all?"

"She is asleep," interposed the physician—Doctor Cheatham.

"Ah! Well, I can have my parting with her to-morrow, too. I am weary now—wearily to death. Please let every one leave me except—Mr. Bardine."

The request was at once acceded to, even Miss Phillips, the nurse, quitting the room with the others.

Left alone with the master of Redwood, Madelaine looked at him some moments without speaking—a world of mournfulness in her darkly beautiful eyes, which yet contained a suggestion of mockery.

"When I am gone, Walsingham," she at last said, "shall you remember me chiefly as a wicked woman—the bane of your domestic life—or as something of a mystery, whom perhaps you could never understand?"

"As a mystery, and that alone—an incomprehensible, a ravishing mystery!" he hurriedly replied, as soon as he could command his voice.

Her eyelids drooped their silken fringes, a hushed expression of thankfulness and satisfaction coming into her face.

"Would that I could live!" she murmured, just audibly. "I might then be more of a woman, and less of a mystery, to you, my beloved! Bend over me, Walsingham, and let me dream you kissed me ere I died."

He did as she entreated, and then started back, with an exclamation of alarm.

It was as if he had kissed the lips of an iron image, and those lips red-hot; while a fearfully

convulsive change—agonized or demoniac, there was no telling which, it passed so quickly—had sprung into her features, only to be instantly followed by a death-like ghastliness and rigidity.

He sprung to the door.

"Here, nurse!—quick!"

But when the nurse had resumed her place at the bedside, Madelaine once more lay at peace, and seemingly fast asleep.

"I shall not retire for the night," said Mrs. Douglass, in her quietly resolute way, a little later on, "and shall make it my duty to look in on Miss Valdemar every half-hour, at least. Her condition is such as to demand this additional attention at my hands. Let me prevail upon all of you, gentlemen, to seek the rest of which I am sure you are in greater need than I."

She was parting with the trio at the door of a small spare room, in which she had elected to pass the night, and whence was distinctly visible the entire length of the lighted passage upon which the sick-chamber opened; with the ponderous butler seated on guard at its door, in his lap a heap of story-papers, of whose sensational serials he was an habitual devourer, and with which he declared his ability to watch out the tedious and lonely hours without closing an eyelid.

Mr. Bardine would have protested against this self-sacrificing intention on the part of the worthy woman, but she was not to be dissuaded, and he at length yielded.

"Well," said he, as they were going, "I shall occupy one of the spare rooms close to Cheatham and Falconbridge in the adjoining passage so that you will know where to find us in case of an emergency. By the way, how is William getting over his injuries?"

"As he was scarcely presentable," replied Mrs. Douglass, "I gave him permission to keep his room till to-morrow. I presume he is there still. The cook has been kindly supplying him with poultices and refreshments throughout the day."

It was just midnight when the three gentlemen paused, ere separating for the night, at the doors of their respective apartments, a few minutes later, and regarded each other with mutually inquiring looks.

"Well, what do you make of the situation now?" asked Mr. Bardine at last.

"No more of your plagued riddles at this time of the night!" snapped out Cheatham, with a harassed and defeated look. "Or put them to Falconbridge here. They're more in his line than mine." And he incontinently shuffled off into his room.

"Wait and see," was the detective's answer; and then both Mr. Bardine and he, feeling completely outworn, lost no time in imitating the old gentleman's example.

It was in the deepest hush of the dark hour that precedes the dawn that Falconbridge was aroused from his sleep of exhaustion by something like a muffled cry.

He had left his door open to admit the light from the passage, but an air from the open window had blown it shut.

The cry was repeated more unmistakably as he hurried on some of his garments in the darkness, and this was followed by something like a fall.

As he sprung into the passage, Bardine and Cheatham, also half-dressed, were just emerging alarmedly from their respective apartments, and a startling spectacle was presented to the three.

It was that of Mrs. Douglass, the housekeeper, her face streaming with blood from a gash or bruise on the forehead, staggering toward them from the direction of the main passage.

She had stumbled and fallen, but risen again, and seemed all but completely overcome.

"Miss Valdemar—Garda—the big footman!" she gasped, waving her arms in a helpless, dazed way. "Gone! gone! gone!"

Then she fainted, and, while Mr. Bardine caught her falling form in his arms, Falconbridge and Cheatham hurried to Madelaine's chamber.

The butler was riveted to his sentry-chair, his eyes fixed, his mouth open, as if petrified. In the room the nurse was found in a similar condition beside the bed, which was empty.

Further investigation proved that Garda and William had likewise disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DARK DAYS.

NEARLY an entire week had passed, and not a trace had been discovered of the hypnotizer and her thrall-victims, as they may be called.

Mrs. Douglass's account of the wonderful evanishment that had been effected was substantially this:

She had visited Miss Valdemar's room twice, to find the patient on each occasion apparently buried in a trance-like slumber, with both the nurse and the butler wakeful and attentive at their respective posts. When about to emerge from her own chamber for a third visit to the sick-room, at three in the morning, she had been startled by seeing Garda—fully dressed, as if for a journey, but evidently in the somnam-

bulistic trance—swiftly passing the door. Instantly following, she had, to her amazement, perceived Miss Valdemar, likewise dressed for outdoors, and in the restored fullness of her health and beauty, calmly standing before the open door of her apartment, at which the butler was riveted in his chair, apparently stupefied beyond sense or motion, and out of which William, the giant flunkie, was just emerging, with a packed valise in either hand, while there also stood in the passage Miss Valdemar's large traveling trunk, evidently just deposited there from the interior of the room but a few moments previously. Miss Valdemar's face wore a stern, somewhat mocking look. Otherwise her aspect was that of a lady calmly overseeing the transfer of her effects, as a preliminary to setting out upon a business-like but somewhat hurried tour, though her countenance lighted up with what the housekeeper described, perhaps not without a tinge of prejudice, as "a strangely evil look of gloating satisfaction" at the sight of Garda hurrying toward her with submissive eagerness, while, more wonderful than all, the footman also, though sufficiently alert and intelligent in his movements, seemed wholly guided and impelled by a mysterious mesmeric power, as distinctly apart from his own volition as would have been in the case of a gigantic and life-like puppet controlled by a cunningly operated mechanism in which it could have no concern.

But at sight of the housekeeper, who had instantly advanced with a bewildered exclamation, Madelaine's face had darkened venomously, while she muttered something commandingly to William. The latter had thereupon dropped the valises, and promptly knocked the housekeeper down. The latter, prostrated, but not wholly insensible from the cowardly blow, had then had a faint notion of hearing heavy footsteps, probably those of the footman, burdened with the trunk and valises, descending the stairs, then of the opening and closing of the front door below, accompanied by a noise of wheels upon the driveway. Then had ensued a brief period of unconsciousness, after which she had succeeded in giving the alarm, as we have seen.

Neither Miss Phillips, the hired nurse, nor Smith, the butler, had anything noteworthy to state in explanation of the powerlessness that had taken possession of them at the critical moment; and it is only necessary to further mention that the servant who had been left in charge of Garda was found in a similarly unaccountable state of stupefaction, resembling temporary paralysis.

Those were dark days at Redwood Grange following upon the disappearance of Garda. Mr. Bardine, perhaps rightly, would permit no publicity to be made of the affair; merely consenting to Falconbridge making private inquiries, which had thus far, after a period of six days, resulted in no clew to her whereabouts.

"Garda is really Madelaine's daughter," he argued. "Even if found, I would have no moral right to lay claim to her, or even to withhold my knowledge of the relationship existing between the two. Still it breaks my heart to lose the child, and I would make such an offer as might tempt the mother to resign her claims. But I could in conscience do nothing more. As for Madelaine herself, she has committed no crime in tricking us as she has done; and, apart from her own confession, it would be next to impossible to fasten upon her the responsibility for Agathe's death, or for subsequent attempts at assassination. Then William, as a hypnotizee, must be held as blameless of conscious wrong-doing as poor Garda herself. None of my property was taken, and even some wages were due the man at the time of his disappearance. Let us track the fugitives, by all means, if it be possible, but solely with the purpose of rescuing Garda from her terrible association with such a woman; and, if that should not be feasible, we may at least, and as a last resort, appeal to Madelaine's maternal instincts in the unhappy child's behalf."

Such had been the line adopted by the detective in prosecuting the search, though, as the days came and went fruitlessly, Mr. Bardine became so changed a man as to excite commiserating speculation on the part of both Falconbridge and the old physician, who still maintained his stay at the Grange.

He grew alternately morose and abstracted, and, together with these moods, there was developed a sudden fascination for Mrs. Douglass's exclusive society, which was no less pathetic in its nature than perhaps flattering to the good woman's secret satisfaction.

"I am becoming a fatalist," he would say, in her presence, to the doctor and the detective; "and I have a firm presentiment that I am in some sort of constant danger that Marion's society"—he had already come to the point of addressing the comely widow by her Christian name—a significant sign—"can alone guard me against."

Mrs. Douglass would thereupon look as seriously unconcerned as might be, while Cheatham would perhaps hazard some rallying remark, and Falconbridge would maintain his accustomed taciturnity.

But the two latter would none the less understand him as meaning some yet to be dreaded danger on the part of the missing Madelaine; and in this light Bardine's growing intimacy with his housekeeper was a sufficiently encouraging sign in his favor, were it not for the increasing melancholy that seemed to accompany it.

"Walsingham is a ruinously changed man, unless we can effect a reaction in him," the old physician said to Falconbridge one morning toward the close of this dismal period at the Grange. "Even his literary ambition is a thing of the past, and he does nothing but brood and mope. Garda must be restored to him soon, and that sorceress-witch Valdemar be effectively squelched—crushed out of thought and mind, you understand—or I won't answer for his continued sanity."

It was at the breakfast-table, from which Mr. Bardine had freshly excused himself a few minutes previously, and the detective looked up from the morning paper that he had been glancing at over his coffee.

"State just what you think the trouble with him to be," he said, briefly.

"Gad! you must know as well as I. It isn't only the loss of the child, it is the banefully lingering memory of her witch-mother's beauty that is slowly killing him with moral fear. I use the word advisedly. He pines for, yet dreads, the evil fascination he has sense enough to know was unmanning and degrading while it controlled him."

"Exactly. Why, then, do not you, as his privileged friend, no less than his physician, advise him as to the instant remedy within his reach?"

"The deuce, man! What may that be?"

"To marry his housekeeper off-hand, and be a new man forthwith."

Cheatham gave a low whistle, and then shook his head slowly.

"Heroic treatment, my boy, surely!" he observed. "I would not like to venture upon the prescription, with so touchy a fellow as Walsingham. However, that will take care of itself sooner or later: for, but for the poisonous memory referred to, I am as satisfied that he would love Marion to distraction as I am that she would make him a noble and deserving helpmeet in every sense of the good old word. But it can't be hurried. Now if we only had Garda back again!"

"But what can I do when hampered, hand and foot, by the man's morbid and constant injunctions to slinking caution and secrecy in the search, and especially now when he seems to have fallen into an apathy over the whole affair? Even though I feel satisfied that Madelaine is biding in New York, with her brace of victims, it is like the proverbial needle in a botle of hay!"

"True; it is no fault of yours."

"There is nothing like patience, however," continued Falconbridge, with a contented smile. "Here is my clew at last, and Madelaine cannot disappoint us much longer by failing to put in a re-appearance here, for the purpose of playing her last desperate card for the hand and fortune of the master of Redwood—and failing disastrously at that, or I am no gamester myself in the game of fate. Read that!"

He passed over the newspaper, indicating a certain news item.

It described the arrest of a mysterious girl-splinter in a prominent jewelry store, and also of an equally mysterious man—a fresh-faced and herculean Cockney, judging by his speech—who had interfered with her arrest to the extent of knocking a couple of policemen down. The girl was refined and lady-like, but persistently refused to give her name, address, or any other account of herself; and in this strange incommunicativeness she had been imitated by her would-be rescuer. Stranger than all, both girl and man seemed to be in a partly dazed or dreamy condition, as if but imperfectly realizing the gravity of their position. An additional mystery was created at the preliminary examination of the prisoners, by a man named Strathspey—himself but recently a prisoner on a charge of black-mailing, but discharged through a withdrawal of the complaint—chancing to be present and asserting that he knew the young lady's name and parentage, which, however, he refused to state until he should have had an opportunity to communicate with a certain influential and wealthy gentleman, interested in her welfare, but whom he also declined to name. The prisoners had been committed.

The newspaper dropped from the old physician's hands.

"Of course, the culprits are Garda and the footman!" exclaimed he.

"Without a doubt," and the detective rose in his quiet, business-like way.

"What shall you do?"

"Get them out of their quandary with as little delay as possible; while you, on your part, in the mean time—"

"Well, well?"

"Will be on the lookout for Mr. Strathspey or Madelaine, whichever may arrive first—it's a wonder that the former, at least, is not on hand

ere this—and, in any event, keep Mr. Bardine mum as to revelations until I can return here with the prisoners."

"By Jupiter! I'll do it."

Falconbridge had hardly quitted the grounds before he met Strathspey furtively approaching the Grange.

"Don't trouble Mr. Bardine again just yet, my man," said he. "Better come with me."

"Ah!" returned Strathspey; "you are the secretary, eh?"

"That, and something else which you ought to remember."

"What are you?"

"Falconbridge, the detective, whose testimony hanged Juan Valdemere in New Orleans fifteen years ago. Now will you come with me?"

Strathspey looked mystified and scratched his head.

"On reflection, sir," he replied, after a hesitating pause, "I rather think I will."

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

##### THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

FALCONBRIDGE'S first step was to bring together the jeweler, upon whose charge Garda had been arrested, and the justice by whom she had been remanded.

He then afforded them certain explanations, the nature of which will be sufficiently obvious to the reader, and such as could not fail to excite their profoundest interest and sympathy.

The stolen articles had been recovered, and it fortunately happened that both the jeweler and the justice were humane and intelligent gentlemen, while the detective's reputation was such as to convince them of his thorough responsibility in everything that he proposed and requested in the matter.

As a consequence, Falconbridge secured the conditional discharge of the prisoners, and, followed respectfully by Strathspey, took them with him to his down-town office, where he had arranged to receive intelligence from Dr. Cheatham in the event of anything of importance turning up at the Grange, and where Garda especially, as though breaking at last through a mysterious spell which had theretofore compelled her to reticence, became gradually communicative and emotional.

William, for the most part, maintained the dazed or sullen composure and indifference which had distinguished him, it seemed, from the first, but did not offer any objection to the disclosures extracted from his young mistress.

It was a harrowing tale which the victimized young girl gradually made known amid sobs and tears—Strathspey, of course, not being permitted to be present.

The hypnotizer had taken her "subjects" with her to some elegantly-furnished rooms in the top of an apartment-house in a crowded section of the city. There they had set out to live in strict temporary seclusion—William being rigidly relegated to a menial position in the domestic arrangement—until such time as Madelaine should be able to safely revisit Redwood Grange with such propositions as, according to Garda, she did not doubt would result in securing her marriage with Mr. Bardine upon the spot. In the mean time, both Garda and William were more or less constantly under her mesmeric influence, to the extent that they were the mere automata of her iron will. But misfortune had attended the modern Calypso's new plot almost from the start. The very first night of their occupancy of their new quarters, burglars had succeeded in making way with every penny that Madelaine possessed, including four hundred dollars freshly obtained from her Savings Bank account, not even the trinkets and similar valuables belonging to Garda and herself being spared.

In this desperate strait Madelaine had resorted to an expedient no less criminal than heartless. Garda had been duly placed under the hypnotic spell, and sent out upon shop-lifting expeditions; William, similarly spell-ridden, accompanying her in the character of a family servant, or at night being dispatched upon foot-padding enterprises on his own account, so far as his mechanical movements were concerned; Madelaine herself remaining securely at home, directing the criminal operations from the invisible cell-crypt of her mesmeric power, as a hermit spider controlling the sensitive touch-threads of her cunning web from the crannied seclusion of her secret den.

The disclosures on this point were such as to try the credulity of even the veteran detective. If Garda was to be believed, and she asserted nothing that was not subsequently verified, both she and William had been repeatedly successful in their irresponsible depredations upon the public, prior to the detection that had caused their arrest, and their witch-mistress's depleted coffers had already been considerably replenished, with a fine prospect of added gains.

"This is simply horrible!" exclaimed Falconbridge. "Tell me, Garda, did you not experience a sense of shame and terror while obeying these criminal impulsions?"

"I did, I did!" replied the child, weeping afresh. "But I could not help myself. Indeed, indeed, I could not, sir; no, not if a gal-

lows had risen before my face! And Madelaine would only laugh at me when I told her afterward how dreadfully I felt. 'You will get used to it,' she would say. 'And a thief is no worse than any one else in the world, if only one is never found out.' Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"And how was it with you?" asked the detective, turning to the footman.

The latter shifted uneasily in his seat, and gave a silly sort of laugh.

"I never cared so much, sir, even when knocking a chap on the 'ead, or making a grab for his watch or purse," he admitted, "when I found as I couldn't well 'elp it, an' knew as it would win me a hextra smile from Madelaine." Here his brow darkened, and he continued savagely: "She marry Mr. Bardine! He wouldn't 'ave 'er. She'll marry me, sooner or later, or—" His ponderous fists closed convulsively, and he finished with a muttering of unintelligible words.

It was now mid-day, and Falconbridge was consoling the still weeping and trembling Garda as best he might, while meditating the advisability of visiting Madelaine's retreat with his charges, in the possibility of finding her there, when his assistant, Master Dodd, who had been keeping Strathspey company in an adjoining ante-room, entered with a dispatch from Dr. Cheatham.

It was sufficiently laconic:

"Madelaine here, and mischief threatening. Come at once."

Waiting only long enough to return an answer to the dispatch in kind, the detective set out at once for the Grange.

He led the way, with Garda, now somewhat more composed, under his wing; his assistant following, accompanied by Strathspey and the footman.

William seemed stolidly contented at the prospect of being once more in his enslaver's presence, and that without delay; while Strathspey had been given to understand that his sole chance of obtaining a fee lay in his obedience to the detective's instructions in whatever developments the growing situation might afford.

Arriving at the Grange, Dr. Cheatham and Falconbridge were speedily in secret conference, during which the necessary explanations were exchanged.

"When did Madelaine come?" was the detective's first query following upon these preliminaries.

"Scarcely an hour ago," was the reply; "and looking more beautiful and seductive than ever before, if that were possible." He knitted his brows resentfully as he spoke, the account of Garda's experience at the woman's hands having made a painful impression upon him.

"Where is she now?"

"With Walsingham and Mrs. Douglass, out under that oak tree from up in whose branches we witnessed her mysterious goings on."

"With Mrs. Douglass, too? That is encouraging."

"Yes; and Bardine's conduct from the first had been an agreeable surprise to me."

"And as disappointing to our hypnotizer?"

"Yes; if he only holds his own against her, as I hope and trust. Come; we had better go out to them alone at first."

Strathspey, William and Garda had been left in Tommy Dodd's charge in an adjoining room; and, as Cheatham and Falconbridge were going, there came to them the sound of sobs and joyous cries from within.

It was the old nurse, Venus, taking the missing daughter of the house to her honest bosom once more.

Then Tommy Dodd came running out after the detective.

"It discounts Sarah Bernhardt in her boss role in there, my liege!" he exclaimed, in unaffected consternation. "What am I to do?"

"Let the emotional scene proceed uninterrupted, and await my instructions," was the reply; and Tommy returned to his post.

When the detective and the physician reached the oak-shaded nook, a dramatic scene, in which they were destined to take prominent parts, was well under way.

Mr. Bardine, with his arm thrown protectingly around Marion Douglass, who was very pale and agitated, was confronted by Madelaine, who, erect, before them, in all the glory of her magnificent beauty, was evidently putting forth the utmost exertion of her baneful mesmeric power upon them both.

With hand outstretched, her cheeks glowing, her superb eyes ablaze, her exquisite form seemingly dilated with a mysterious internal force, she looked like a pythoness of old in the midst of her magic incantations.

The intruders stayed their advance for a moment, and held aloof before their presence was perceived.

It was evident that Mrs. Douglass was already impressed in no inconsiderable degree by the hypnotizing spell thus being exerted, for she was more or less bewildered and controlled already, though evidently still struggling bravely against the malign influence. But Mr. Bardine had up to this point maintained his self-poise comparatively undisturbed, and there was also

in his face and mien a stern indignation that was as refreshing to the onlookers of the strange scene as it may have been disappointing or baffling to Madelaine herself.

"You must, you shall surrender, both of you!" hissed the latter between her parted lips. "I will have it so—I command it!"

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### PLAYED AND LOST.

As she spoke, Madelaine seemed to be putting forth a supreme effort, mental, moral and volitional, which was testing her magnetic power to the utmost tension, and which the majority of subjective natures would perhaps have found irresistible.

As it was, Marion uttered a low cry, and, shrinking yet further into her companion's protecting arm, she seemed on the point of fainting. Bardine, however, remained defiant and calm, though a perceptible shiver through his muscular frame betrayed the cruel degree to which his countering will force had been tested.

He burst into a harsh laugh.

"Courage, Marion, and look up to me!" he exclaimed to his companion, and gathering her yet closer in his strong embrace. "It was the mesmerizing-murderess's grand coup, and she has failed!"

Madelaine had recoiled, pale, spent, seemingly exhausted, but was rallying her mysterious force for yet another assault, like a tigress gathering herself together for yet another hurtling spring.

It was a strange duel, a psychological combat, such as held both the detective and the physician momentarily spell-bound as to what might be its significance and outcome.

"Such a name to me and from you, Walsingham—you who loved me!" murmured Madelaine, with the old, rich music in her voice, while cunningly preparing for the next output of her mysterious magnetism. "Oh, shame! shame!"

"It is false!" exclaimed Bardine indignantly. "Charmed, glamoured, fascinated I may have been by your infernal beauty, and almost to my perdition, body and soul, but that I ever loved you, damnable, unscrupulous sorceress that you are! is falser than yourself, more monstrous than—than—"

He finished with a gasp, fairly staggering back, with Mrs. Douglass still convulsively clinging to him, for at that instant the hypnotizer, dilating afresh—her eyes like lustrous stars, her wonderful beauty quiveringly erect and illuminated, as it were, with a sort of ecstatic desperation—had once more launched forth her mysterious power, like a glittering and deadly serpent suddenly lashing, arrow-like, out of its coil.

Bardine swayed to and fro, as if enveloped in an electric cloud, then seemed to fight his way back to a sort of panting rigidity, where he remained, combative and defiant still, but momentarily helpless.

There she seemed to hold him, transfixed, as it were, by invisible bayonet-points, fluid but of steely consistency, pouring out of her quiveringly extended arm and finger-tips, while once again her impassioned utterance as of old—all that he could dream of siren melody and charm—floated from her red, parted lips into his senses and his soul.

"What you would forget how you once loved me, how in these grounds and among these listening trees your loving words responded to mine!" murmured the delectable voice. "It must not be, my beloved. Look upon my beauty and tell me if you can, that in curve, lineament or delicate color it has dimmed. Behold my eyes and say if ever womanly glance leaped through diviner crystals in response to love's demand. Are these lips of mine less dewy and bright than when your delirious kisses melted upon their thrilling sweets? Is this rounded form less incomparably flexible and fair than when crushed and folded in your transperteing embrace? And yet you would forget? You would dare to believe that my spirit is less heavenly and less desirable than its fleshly tenebment, which is so blindingly and deliciously fair? No, no; you would not, you dare not! Already, my beloved! is my beauty resuming its enchantment upon your senses and upon your spirit!"

Her sweet, rippling laugh punctuated her incantation—it was nothing less—like an instrumental variation in the pauses of an enchanting song, for there was no idle vaunt in those last words.

Bardine's face had gradually assumed a rapt look, he seemed to be fairly at the mercy once more of Madelaine's superhuman witchery, and Marion, who had so far recovered upon her own part as to be gazing entreatingly up into his face, though still helplessly, was apparently no longer aught but an incumbrance upon his arm of which he was hardly conscious.

"Thou art once more my own, my beloved!" went on the siren voice. "Is it not so? Thou wilt yet speak the binding word that will pledge your honor and your life to me henceforth forevermore! That smile is my answer. Come!" She extended both hands now, smilingly, bewilderingly, and he advanced a step, like one in a dream. "Come, then, my beloved! and as a

proof of your sincerity, let that half-faded Scotch right no longer find your support." His arm straightened listlessly, and Marion, with a sad, despairing little moan, sunk in a confused heap upon the ground. "Come, my beloved! All's well again, and you are love's and mine!"

Bardine stretched out his arms with a hoarse, infatuated cry. In another instant he would have been at her feet, her victory complete.

But at this juncture the detective, after whispering to his companion, stepped abruptly forward.

"Be a man!" he hoarsely exclaimed, catching Mr. Bardine by the shoulders and shaking him roughly. "Be a man, sir—not the sense-wheedled dupe of that heartless and foul fiend in woman's seductive form! Look at her now—degraded, groveling in her deserved defeat! and then look there"—he pointed to Marion, who had burst the thrall of the sorceress's spell, and was now slowly rising to her feet, looking at him gratefully—"where true womanhood offers you its honorable meed as an off-set to a hell-cat's wiles!"

Bardine covered his eyes, and coming even more slowly than Marion out of the spell that had deluded him, took in the significance of his surroundings—of the situation which had changed so fortunately.

Falconbridge had spoken truly.

Panting and helpless from the reaction, against which it was deemed now quite evident she was past the rallying point for some time to come—almost hideous in her desperation and defeat—perhaps fully realizing that she had played her last bold card in the game of fortune, and had lost beyond redemption, the adventuress was glaring balefully at them from the crushed, exhausted and temporarily helpless attitude into which she had recoiled at the unexpected snapping of her master-spell.

Walsingham Bardine returned her glare for an instant with a look of mingled wonder and self-contempt.

Then he shook himself resolutely.

"How could I have thought, even dreamed, of a fascination in her?" he muttered, audibly.

He then turned and took the still trembling widow to his heart with a humble, forgiveness-begging look and gesture that were noble in their simplicity.

With a hoarse sort of roar, the ruined adventuress drew a keen dagger from her bosom, and sprung at the detective's throat.

But unexpected and sudden as was the attack, it was evaded and nullified by a counter-motion on the part of the veteran Falconbridge, cleverer and swifter than her own.

In an instant she was disarmed, her broken weapon on the ground, and she at arm's-length in his iron grasp, while the eagle eyes were darting their resentful fires, from out the unruffled calmness of his Sphinxian countenance, into her ruined and lost soul.

"Woman!—for I will still deign to call you such, monster that you are!—was the compact between us, into which you tricked me on your fictitious death-bed, all a farce, or are you content to hear me?"

She suddenly fell away from his clutch, and folded her arms in a deathlike composure, wherein her singular beauty once more asserted itself, in a helpless, crestfallen way, as her features lost their passion-wrought distortion.

"I recognize the inevitable—I have made my last throw and lost," she said, in a low voice. "No, Falconbridge, the bargain that I proposed to you, though conceived with the object of temporarily deceiving you, was not not all a mockery. Now, without further deceit, my time is short—my sands of life nigh run. Promise to fulfill your part of the compact, and I will so far trust you as to complete my part in advance—here on the spot."

"Do this, Madelaine," said the detective, impressively, "and I promise in return to do even more than I agreed."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NEMESIS.

SHE looked at him with a sort of despairing wonder.

"You promised originally," she said, "to discover my child's remains and give them decent burial after I should be no more."

The detective gravely nodded.

"What more can you do than this?"

"You shall see."

"But I shall be dead."

"Perhaps you will wish to live—perhaps not. I cannot promise as to that. Give me the missing documents, as you promised, and we shall see."

A sudden eagerness had come into the beautiful, despairing face. She had slowly thrust her hand into her bosom, as if to produce the coveted papers, but stayed the movement.

"Speak, Falconbridge!" she faltered, growing wildly agitated. "You cannot mean that Strathspay tricked me—that—that my Inez never died at all? Speak, I say!" her voice had risen almost to a scream. "Hai! I see it in your face, adamantine as it is. You cannot mean that?"

He had hesitated in his turn. Lost, unworthy, self-damned, as he felt and knew her to be, she was still a woman.

"I do mean that," he replied at last. "Your child lives. Give me the papers, and she shall be made known to you."

Unsuspicious of the appalling truth, she tore a packet from her bosom.

"Take them, take them!" she cried, thrusting them into his hand. "Nay, I also will do more than I agreed." She likewise produced a small book. "Take this, too! It is my diary, Falconbridge—the record of my mysterious past and its mysterious crimes!" she also thrust the book into his keeping. "It may hang me—brand me for all time as an unusual monster, a fiend-woman, at whose name my sex shall shudder and mankind grow pale. That is at your own discretion. Use it as you will. It is yours. Now for the secret! My child, my lost Inez! Where shall I find her—where snatch her to my long desolated heart?"

Her agitation was no less frightful than pitiable.

Falconbridge had already assured himself that the papers were genuine, and now a side-glance told him that Dr. Cheatham was close at hand, awaiting his additional signal, with Garda at his side; while Tommy Dodd was bringing up the masked rear of the advance, so to speak, with William and Strathspay.

"Why do you not speak?" screamed Madelaine, and she clutched the detective's arm with agonizing earnestness, oblivious to aught else in her surroundings. "Great God! can you realize the yearnings of a mother's heart, even in a crime-polluted breast? Are you then but spitefully mocking me? Does my child, my innocent Inez, really live, Falconbridge?"

"It is the truth," he replied, still hesitating. "I would not deceive you, Madelaine."

"Speak, then! Give her to me! Man, man!" she again clutched his arm, with both hands; "I want my child, my lost one, my angel Inez! She, at least, must have been preserved spotless, pure, unstained as snow! Give her back to me!"

"She is here."

He raised his hand, and Dr. Cheatham led forward Garda, whose white face, now that she was wholly freed from the accursed magnetic spell, was filled with horror and repulsion, showing that she had heard and understood.

Falconbridge turned away his head as he continued: "Garda is your lost Inez, Madelaine. Strathspay deceived you as to her death, having really given her up to Mr. Bardine for adoption. Strathspay himself is here in support of what I assert."

Strathspay lost no time in stepping forward with an affirmative gesture.

Madelaine had silently recoiled, her wide, hungering eyes fastening upon Garda's loathing face with a wild, wondering and appalled look.

"God of Vengeance!" she murmured; "can this be true? It must be so—my child never favored her father or me. And yet she—Garda—whom I have thus steeped to the lips in unconscious, irresponsible guilt!"

Dr. Cheatham was less leniently disposed than the others.

"It is, indeed, true!" he exclaimed, venomously. "Adventuress, you find your Nemesis at last. The unoffending innocent, whose nature you would have thus so indifferently corrupted—God grant you may have failed to contaminate the spiritual germs of her being!—is your own child. Look! no wonder that she shudders and shinks from your approach, as from a thing deadly, unforgivable and accursed." This was but too true, Madelaine having just recoiled afresh, pallidly frantic at the young girl's loathing and unmistakable aversion. "It is your Nemesis!" he repeated, with his shrill, bitter laugh. "The serpent may not mother the dove, howsoever soiled, nor the bereaved tigress take unto her bosom the mangled lamb! Miserable being! such is the fruit of a sublime and exceptional gift which might have been made a boon to science, a blessing to mankind, but which you have perverted to infamous and guilty ends. Whatsoever past crimes may be clamoring for vengeance at your black soul's secret door I know not—let us trust that your diary will enlighten us therein—but this at least is certain that the blood of Agathe Bardine is upon your head!"

He would have said more, but that he was unexpectedly silenced by Marion Douglass, who interposed with a shocked and indignant gesture.

"Peace and for shame, sir!" she cried, with noble magnanimity. "In that she is a woman and a mother, her desolation should be sacred!"

Bur Madelaine hardly seemed to hear or care.

She had again advanced a step toward her child, her face a speechless agony of appeal, her trembling hands extended beseechingly, palm upward, the tapering fingers half-hooked like the talons of a bird.

"Inez—Garda!" she murmured, piteously; "you have heard, you understand that you are my own—that it was my youthful bosom (alas! I was hardly of your present age at that time) that nursed you, into which you crept and nestled as a prattling babe? You understand

this, and yet you—you would renounce me, me, your mother?"

Garda covered her face with her hands, and, with a nervous scream, fled into Mr. Bardine's arms, where she clung, moaning terrified. "Papa, papa, I have only you! Save me from her, save me!"

The action was sufficiently significant and final.

The lost woman straightened herself, with a fierce effort. She passed her hand slowly over her face, and when she took it away there was a terrible change.

Her beauty was there still, but subdued with an awful expression—the impress of a soul without hope and without fear.

She burst into a harsh laugh.

"I am decidedly *de trop* in the world at last, it seems!" she cried. "Who will have me before the master-devil claims his own?"

William, the giant flunkie, with a savage and yet devouring air, suddenly strode forward, and rudely grasped her wrist:

"I'll have you; so come along!" he said, with brutal energy.

She hurled him back, and then with a grand, majestic sweep of her mysteriously sceptered hand—the last exhibition of her occult power for those present—she held him, for an instant, cowering and dazed.

"Go! I follow."

He went lumbering away through the trees, apparently the one remaining thrall-slave of her invincible magic to the last.

She was following him, slowly, thoughtfully, as if oblivious of her surroundings—a fallen angel, beautiful in form, ruined in spirit, dauntlessly stepping to her doom—but gradually paused and turned.

"May I proffer a last request of you—alone?" she asked, addressing Mr. Bardine with a pathetic humility. "It is a mercenary one," bitterly—"I will say that much before them all."

Mr. Bardine, who still had the sobbing Garda in his arms, hesitated.

"Don't consent," counseled the detective, in a low voice. "No penitence there—only desperation."

"Do consent," advised Marion, taking charge of Garda. "The woman is doubtless penniless; that is what she means."

It was what Madelaine meant, at least for the time being.

As Mr. Bardine joined her, she led him slightly apart from observation.

"Can such a lost wretch as I," she asked, "be deserving of any pity from you?"

"You have my pity, at all events," he replied, with cold contempt. "Wait!"

He produced a check-book and a fountain-pen—they were a rich man's luxury in which he had long indulged himself—and began to write.

When he had partly filled a check, he looked up at her expectantly.

"You are destitute?"

"Yes, sir," lowering her eyes and with a shame-faced flush.

"How much?"

"What you please—in charity."

He filled out the draft, also indorsing it on the back, that she might obtain the cash without identification at the bank, and handed it to her, without a word.

Before folding it up and placing it in her bosom, with a profound courtesy, she glanced at the amount, which was for five thousand dollars.

"Good God!" she exclaimed, involuntarily; "you couldn't help being princely if you were to try."

An impatient gesture on the part of the gentleman.

"Are we quits?"

Without replying, she raised her glorious eyes, brimming with tears, all the old beauty returning into her impassioned face, in spite of a mocking smile, a Bacchante recklessness, that renewed his self-fears, and yet caused his pulses to leap.

"Begone!" he exclaimed, furiously, self-contemptuously. "Witch! would you dare design afresh?"

But there was something that made him feel uncomfortable in her low, musical laugh as she disappeared.

Bardine, however, was thoroughly composed when he rejoined his friends, putting his check-book and pen back in his pocket before their eyes.

"A mere trifle," he said, indifferently. "The woman was simply destitute. Let us return to the house."

This was accordingly done.

Then, when Garda, as we shall still call her, had at last sobbed herself into complete exhaustion, and been tenderly conveyed to her own room, the Sphinx Detective, with a few words of explanation, placed in the astonished Marion Douglass's hands the documentary proofs that made her legally eligible to her dead husband's Scotch inheritance.

After exchanging a few whispered words with Falconbridge, Mr. Bardine had said to Strathspay, "Fellow, this gentleman, Mr. Gainsborough, will dispose of your business," after

which he had hastily quitted the group, together with Marion.

"Here you are, my man," then observed the detective, handing a bank-note to the would-be black-mailer. "Mr. Bardine is more lenient to you than I would be. You are now to take yourself off."

The man turned the money over in his hand. It was a hundred dollar note.

"Hal!" he exclaimed. "You don't really suppose as how I'll keep mum in all this queer business for such a beggarly pittance as this, do you?"

Whereat, Major Falconbridge distinguished the rascal with a piece of demonstrative condescension in which he did not frequently indulge.

He incontinently kicked him out of doors.

#### CHAPTER XXX.

##### BRUISED BUT NOT DESTROYED.

In the evening of that same eventful day, Dr. Cheatham found occasion to seek out the detective in his room, with much ill-suppressed eagerness in his manner.

"I say, my dear Falconbridge!" he exclaimed.

"The same to you, my dear doctor!" And the detective put aside the newspaper he was reading to offer his visitor a chair.

"How about that diary of our defeated hypnotizer?" demanded the old physician. "Interesting reading, eh?"

"I fancy it will prove so."

"What do you mean to say you have not devoured its contents yet?"

"Precisely; I have taken a hurried glance at it, that is all."

"Suppose you let me have it?"

"Oh, no! That would be a little premature, my friend."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, the woman gave me her diary of her own volition, you must remember."

"What of that?"

"I can't help feeling that it is my possession as a sort of trust. Not until I shall hear of her death, or receive assurance, at least, of her continuing absolutely crushed and helpless, can I consent to make the diary public."

Cheatham positively turned pale.

"What absurdity!" he exclaimed. "My dear sir, the interests of psychological science imperatively demand the publicity of the hypnotizer's journal!"

"Then," coolly, "the interests of psychological science will be disappointed, save under the conditions I have mentioned."

"But look here, one of them is already fulfilled. Who could doubt that Madelaine is already crushed and helpless?"

"I doubt it, for one; at least, I am not sure of it."

"Why, her despair was self-evident!"

"We can hope so, and that is all. The head of the serpent may be bruised, without its perilous activity being absolutely nullified."

"I can't think it in this case. Garda's manifest and shrinking horror of the woman was a crusher!"

"Are you aware of the amount of the check with which Mr. Bardine relieved her 'destitution'—the mere trifle, as he called it?"

"No."

"Well, I am, for I have already questioned him on the subject, and bluntly enough. The check was for five thousand dollars."

"The deuce! However, there is nothing like being rich and—soft."

"Just my impression!"

"But what do you infer from this?"

"That, with this amount of money in her possession, the woman *may* venture upon fresh designs."

"Against whom?"

"What a question! Is not her superhuman beauty intact? And didn't you mark Bardine when he returned from that parting pecuniary interview with her?"

"Yes; we must get him married to Marion with the least possible delay."

"That is the medicine."

"But look here, Falconbridge. You might, at least, let me look through that diary."

"Not to be thought of!" And then the old gentleman's face expressed such keen disappointment that the detective relented so far as to say: "I'll tell you what I'll do, my friend. Let the matter rest for, say one week. If in the interim no fresh sign of hostility, or deviltry, is received from Madelaine, we will read the journal over together."

"But should she prove to be still meditating mischief?"

"Gad! we will then not only read the diary, but use it against her, without another moment's delay."

Dr. Cheatham contented himself with this concession, though with a bad enough grace, as he could not but deem that Falconbridge was altogether over-nice in the matter.

At this juncture Mr. Bardine appeared.

"You had better come to Garda, doctor," said he abruptly. "The child's exhaustion is so excessive that Marion is alarmed about her. You come, too, Falconbridge."

They proceeded at once to the young girl's room.

Garda lay in a slumber so hushed and profound as to suggest a condition of coma or trance.

Mrs. Douglass, who sat by the couch, looked anxiously.

"She has been thus for an hour or more," she announced, in her gentle, womanly voice, "though before that her sleep seemed natural and recuperative. I began to fear that—" She hesitated, as the old physician bent over the sleeper attentively.

"You began to fear what?" he asked, presently, with his keen, searching glance.

"That the change might be the condition preceding the somnambulistic fit, or a relapse under that—that person's evil influence."

He laid his hand softly over the sleeper's heart, and continued to watch the scarcely perceptible respirations.

"I think not," he said, after a pause. "There are no indications of other than a natural exhaustion mending itself. However, it would be well for the poor child to be watched constantly."

"As a matter of course, I shall not relinquish my post here during the night," observed Mrs. Douglass, quietly.

Mr. Bardine would have protested, but she silenced him by a half-beseeching gesture, and the gentlemen presently left her alone with her charge.

"Might there be possible grounds for Marion's anxiety?" demanded Bardine, when about separating from his companions at the doors of their rooms.

"Do you mean as to the sorceress attempting to resume her deviltry?" replied Cheatham.

Bardine seemed to wince, though he responded, reluctantly: "That is what I do mean, preposterous as it must seem."

"I don't know anything about it," said the physician, testily. "Better keep everything under bolt and bar, though, as a common precaution against *anything*. For my part, I shall keep myself awake all night reading in bed." And he forthwith brusquely took himself off, with a half-resentful look at parting for the detective, whose obduracy with regard to the hypnotizer's diary he could not quite forgive.

Falconbridge accompanied Mr. Bardine in making the rounds of the house to make sure that all the fastenings were secure, after which they separated for the night, it being then past eleven o'clock.

A feeling of vague uneasiness was upon the former, which was altogether new to his experience.

He compromised with it as well as he was able by going to sleep in a lighted room, with Madelaine's diary thrust under his pillow and a loaded revolver ready to his grasp.

He suddenly started up broad awake to hear the hall clock striking three, and to become aware that he was unaccountably benumbed, as if from a sudden paralytic stroke.

He could just sit up in bed, and grasp his pistol in a nerveless, mechanical way, but nothing more.

Then the door abruptly opened, and Garda, thoroughly dressed as if for a journey, came into the room in the sleep-waking condition, with murderous intent in her hushed face and a small dagger in her hand.

At this instant a loud and terrified cry—Mrs. Douglass's voice—rang pealingly through the silent house.

The detective made a tremendous effort to burst the spell that was upon him, but without success.

Had the walls been crumbling around him in the throes of an earthquake, at that critical moment he could not have stirred hand, foot or tongue.

He could only behold and marvel.

With her wide-staring, but seemingly unseeing, eyes, and her strained face distorted by a deadly frown that seemed petrified thereon, the girl approached the bed upon which she doubtless saw in her dream state the body of the occupant extended prone in the unconsciousness of profound sleep.

"Die!" she muttered, driving her dagger into the beding at a point which his breast might have covered had he still been lying there. "Dog of a detective! it is willed that you must die. Therefore, die, die, die!"

And with each repetition she plunged the weapon to the hilt into the mattress.

Apparently satisfied that this feature of her mission was accomplished, she concealed the knife in her bosom, took the diary from under the pillow, and stalked out of the room.

By a second and supreme effort, Falconbridge managed to just get upon his feet and totter after her as far as the door.

The outside passage was brilliantly lighted.

Just as Garda emerged from the room, Madelaine came sweeping down the passage from the direction of the room which had been occupied by the former, one hand clutching some documents which, pressed to her bosom with a triumphant air, the other grasping a poniard, similar to the one the young girl had wielded, and which was dripping with blood.

At sight of the detective's speechless but undaunted face, her loveliness was fairly blackened with fury and hate.

Dropping her dagger, she sent him reeling back, as with an electric shock, by a violent gesture, and yet he had not the power to resist or hinder by so much as a hair.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### A WITCH-RIDDEN HOUSEHOLD.

The spell-bound detective had sprawled back through the doorway into a sitting posture.

As he did so, the hypnotizer made a motion as if to recover her fallen weapon and dispatch him with it on the spot, but was interrupted by a hoarse, gasping exclamation behind her.

She turned to confront, just issuing from the opposite room, Dr. Cheatham, also apparently somewhat under her overpowering spell, but with his old eyes glistening venomously and a leveled revolver in his trembling hand.

"Demoness! hell-cat!" he inarticulately gasped, as if every word was the outcome of a great effort; "it is a pity to rob science of such a specimen as yourself, but there seems to be no other way."

With that he fired, the bullet, by reason of his tremors, going wide of the mark, and burying itself in the opposite wall.

Madelaine hesitated, then disposed of him as she had disposed of the detective—that is, by hurling him, staggering, back by a fierce, controlling gesture—and then, seizing Garda by the wrist, she buried him.

Slowly the two men got upon their feet and struggled back to a semblance of life and energy.

But even as they did so, the front door was heard to open and shut; this was followed by the sound of a vehicle being rapidly driven away over the graveled driveway; and then smoke and smell of burning began to come up into the passage.

Falconbridge was the first to shake himself together, so to speak.

"The house is on fire!" he exclaimed. "Look to Mrs. Douglass and Bardine!"

Then he ran through the passage toward the front of the house, shouting the fire alarm.

John Henry, Jacob Smith, and the rest of the domestics responded with praiseworthy promptness, and the fire, which was found to have been maliciously kindled in a dust-bin under the main staircase (probably by Madelaine directly after being admitted by Garda through the exertion of her black art, as it may now be truthfully called), was extinguished without much difficulty.

While this was going on, Mr. Bardine, half-dressed and looking half-stupefied, put in an appearance.

Seeing that the danger in this quarter was over, he placed the coachman and butler on guard, sent the female domestics back to their rooms, and, clutching the detective's arm, led him back up-stairs.

"Where is Cheatham?" he gasped, in an unreal voice.

"I sent him on to Mrs. Douglass, while I gave the alarm," replied the detective, now almost himself again. "Didn't you hear her cry out?"

"Who, Marion? God bless me, no!"

"Are you just out of your room?"

"Yes; I awoke benumbed—paralyzed, and was then alarmed by your shoutings through the house, which somehow enabled me to break the spell."

"On, on, then!"

This while they were hurrying in the direction of Garda's room.

There they found the old physician almost gnashing his teeth before the fastened door, which he had vainly exerted his strength to burst open.

"The she devil must have turned the key and carried it away with her, perhaps after murdering the housekeeper!" he gasped.

Mr. Bardine, though trembling like a leaf, was about to attack the barrier, when Falconbridge kindly, but firmly, interposed.

"You are too unstrung," he said. "Let me try."

With that, having stepped back the width of the hall, he suddenly buried his shoulder against the door with the force of a catapult.

Hinges and fastenings gave way, precipitating him into the room, and the others followed.

Madelaine lay unconscious at the side of the deserted couch, the waist of her wrapper, of light-colored material, stained with her blood, which seemed to be welling from a deep knife-thrust in her side.

Without a word, Dr. Cheatham peremptorily waved back his companions as soon as they had mutely assisted in raising the woman upon the couch, while he engaged in a swift professional examination, which must otherwise have exposed the fair and noble bosom to their gaze.

"Saved by the luckiest of accidents!" he presently exclaimed. "Summon the cook or chambermaid temporarily, and then send for Miss Phillips, the professional nurse, at once."

This was accordingly done, and, half an hour later, when day was breaking, Dr. Cheatham rejoined Mr. Bardine and the detective where

they were anxiously awaiting his presence in the library.

The nurse, Amanda Phillips, was already installed in her new responsibility, and the old physician was composedly cheerful.

"The wound is comparatively trifling," he announced, in response to their inquiring looks. "The effects of the shock may be more serious, but the lady is blessed with such an excellent constitution that she ought speedily to be herself again."

He then explained more fully how the dagger-thrust, though doubtless a powerful one and murderously delivered, had been deflected twice, first by a whalebone of the victim's bodice, and then, after piercing the clothing and flesh, by an opportune rib-bone, which had caused the blade to bend and pursue its course just under the skin, while being doubtless driven, nevertheless, up to the hilt, perhaps impressing the would-be murderer with the notion that it had proved fatal, especially if it should prove that Marion had instantly lost consciousness as a consequence.

"What is Marion's condition now?" demanded Mr. Bardine.

"She is sleeping soundly," replied the physician, "under a composing draught which I administered directly upon bringing her out of her faint."

"She recovered consciousness, then?"

"Of course, I restored her at once."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing; I wouldn't permit it. Time enough for her to talk later on."

The three men remained for some moments looking at each other gloomily and in silence.

This was broken by a very unusual action on the part of Mr. Walsingham Bardine.

He struck the table beside him, and uttered a downright oath.

"Could that infernal woman have bewitched the entire household?" he exclaimed.

"No doubt about it," replied Cheatham. "A scientific miracle!"

The Sphinx Detective simply knitted his brows, without directly answering.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### A SET-BACK.

WHEN the three men had exchanged their individual experiences in passing under the hypnotizing spell—and these did not, as psychological revelations, differ greatly from one another—Mr. Bardine looked at the detective moodily.

"You are about the last man in the world, Falconbridge," he said, "whom I should have deemed the sorceress capable of conquering."

"The doctor caved in, too!" growled the detective, to whom the defeat was to remain one of the sore spots of his existence.

"I did, I did!" snapped out the old gentleman. "And the least said about it now, the better. What are we to do and how are we to act? That is the burning question of the moment."

"Or the drowning question, for that matter," cried the master of Redwood. "It's a regular set-back, by Jupiter! We're even worse off, if anything, than before. Marion's inheritance papers again in that woman's possession!" with a groan.

"And Madelaine's diary vanished unread!" exclaimed Cheatham, with a savage look at Falconbridge. "It is more than exasperating!"

"Don't forget, though, that I cast a hurried glance through the journal," said the detective. "Let me think."

"What! can you recall some clew by which we can again bring her to bay?" cried Bardine.

"I hope to."

"Heaven grant you may! Garda must be restored to me at all hazards. The thought of the poor child again in Madelaine's unrestricted power is maddening! And yet I shrink from further publicity. I shall become a laughing-stock."

"Yet Madelaine is the girl's mother," observed Cheatham. "I doubt if you could legally separate them."

"But the law, man!"

"Ah, of course! and then where is the privacy you wish to preserve?"

"True!" with another groan.

"Wait!" from the detective. "Ah, now I have it!"

"A clew to work on afresh?"

"I hope so. Madame Legrande—that was the name!"

"Name of whom?"

"Of a clairvoyante fortune-teller, magnetic-healer, and so on. I remember now to have come upon her name in opening Madelaine's diary, though exactly in what connection I did not discover. However, there is still such a character somewhere in New York. I shall hunt her up the first thing."

Dr. Cheatham looked skeptical.

"Madelaine has five thousand dollars in her pocket," he said. "Don't let us lose sight of that."

"I'm not losing sight of it, for one," observed the detective.

"Nor I," from Bardine. "A curse upon my softness! The woman was doubtlessly already planning this *coup de theatre* at the very mo-

ment she worked upon my commiserating sympathy as she did."

"Of course."

"What is to prevent her being off over the water before we can track her down?" cried Cheatham. "That is, if we must keep the affair apart from publicity."

"William, no less than Garda, would be on her hands," urged the detective. "Don't forget that; and, judging by his manner when we last saw them together, there is more or less danger for the woman in the big footman. But, apart from this, I don't think we need apprehend Madelaine's flight abroad."

"Why?"

"Because, after to-night's trumping play, she must still hope to remain in the game. What is five thousand dollars to an adventuress like Madelaine Valdemar? A bagatelle!"

"But what else can she hope for here?" demanded Bardine.

"You?"

"Me?"

"Yes, sir, you! Let us speak plainly at last. Deny, if you honestly can, Mr. Bardine, that you would not fear a re-exertion of Madelaine's fascinations upon you to their full, even with what you now know of her desperate iniquitousness!"

The master of Redwood flushed and paled, while biting his lip.

"By Heaven! I don't know what to think or say," he admitted, helplessly.

"Stick to Marion!" suggested the old physician, cheerily. "Therein is your bulwark of safety, my old friend. There is no shame in the vacillation, which you are honest enough to admit, since, with such a sorceress as Madelaine in consideration, you are not to be judged by ordinary standards. But there is nothing like a good woman's influence as a foil to a bad one's."

"Good heavens, doctor! don't I know that? Poor dear Marion! God help me for saving it, but with Garda once more rescued, I wish I could see that adventuress dead in her coffin before me!"

"Let me state my theory in all this," interposed Falconbridge. "I think it will help us out somewhat."

They both looked at him hopefully.

"My theory," he went on, "as to Madelaine's objects in this last desperate venture of hers, is this:

"In the first place, I apprehend no further indifference, on her part, to Garda's spiritual debasement as the instrument of crime in her hands.

"Madelaine's love for her daughter, now that she knows Garda as such, cannot be questioned, I think.

"Her chief object in getting her back was the mere craving of possession—a maternal craving, and doubtless with a determination to win the child's love."

"To-night's—last night's—incidents, in which the girl was forced to play an incriminating part, were a necessity with Madelaine, or at least she must have regarded them as such.

"Now that the primary object is achieved, Garda, I am quite sure, will not be made a criminal instrument again.

"While devoting herself to winning her child's love, and, let us say, in holding her dangerous instrument, the giant Cockney, at arm's length, Madelaine will still hope for one more chance of exerting her tremendous fascinations upon you, Mr. Bardine.

"She will be content to keep quiet for a time. Her repossession of Marion's inheritance papers (to say nothing of the diary) gives her a certain advantage. She can destroy them at any moment, and she will know that our knowledge of this must be in her favor.

"Where, then, are we to seek her in this temporary retirement?

"I shall be able to answer that question better after Mrs. Douglass shall be able to give us an account of her share in last night's adventures, and perhaps still better after I shall have hunted up Madame Legrande, and obtained an interview with her.

"Such is my theory, gentlemen, and I only ask for its cool consideration."

They then went to breakfast, and an hour or two later on Dr. Cheatham had the pleasure of reporting Marion Douglass so far improved as to be willing and even eager to tell her story.

Indeed, she presently made her appearance in the library, with the nurse's assistance, and, though pale from loss of blood, managed to appear in very good spirits, with an especial smile for Mr. Bardine as he helped to arrange a luxuriously invalid's chair for her occupancy.

An excuse was found for temporarily dismissing Miss Phillips, and then Marion Douglass forthwith began the story of her experience, without any preliminaries whatever.

"My first impression that something was threatening," she said, "was at half-past two in the morning, or thereabouts."

"I had been reading at Garda's bedside, and had remarked the hands of the little clock on the dressing-case indicating that hour, when I seemed to feel a faint sort of shock, like that produced by an electric battery.

"However, it would not have seriously disturbed me if, upon glancing at Garda, I had not noticed a decided change in her condition.

"She had up to that moment remained in the bushed, trance-like sleep in which you had all left her under my charge. But now her features were suddenly convulsed, she was muttering to herself, and her bands were working spasmodically. It was exactly as if she had been abruptly seized upon by some terrible nightmare, whose hideous promptings she was struggling against with all her dream-energies, so to speak, but without success.

"Instantly the thought of Miss Valdemar, and her baleful power—perhaps being exerted from a considerable distance at that very moment—occurred to me.

"As this terrible suggestion came to me (I had already risen from my chair, and laid down my book), I experienced a second mysterious shock.

"It was fifty times more powerful than the first, causing me to fairly stagger, while Garda, as if permeated by the same overwhelming influence, sat bolt-upright in bed, with wide-open, far-away looking eyes.

"There was also an expression in her face that filled me with horror.

"A set, murderous look, blended with a suggestion of absolute and yet reluctant obedience or submission! I can describe it as nothing else.

"Realizing that the magnetic sorceress was already at work, I collected all my energies and sprung to the door, intending to shout an alarm through the house.

"Why did I not cry out at once? you may ask. My only answer is that the spell of speechlessness, no less than of a physical paralysis in general, was fast overcoming me. Utterance was already denied me, and yet I felt that with the door once opened, and the cool air from the passage striking in upon me, I would be able to cry out.

"But the privilege was not yet accorded me. Before reaching the door I was suddenly arrested, as by an invisible hand of iron, whose remorseless, irresistible fingers were clutching at every fiber and tissue of my frame.

"Then there was a wrenching blow—from out of the air and out of the distance, as it seemed—and I was sent reeling back, speechless and helpless, into the chair at the side of the bed.

"Garda had already arisen, and, oblivious of my presence, was dressing herself mechanically, with silent and rapid expertness.

"Yes, I am coming!" she kept muttering to herself. "Don't be impatient; be can't escape. I am burrying just as fast as I can, I tell you!"

"I could only look at her in shuddering, helpless amazement, and wait.

"Wait for what? For that other and dreadful, perhaps murderous, presence—the presence of Madelaine—which I felt to be already imperviously, silently clamoring for admittance into the sleep-hushed or spell-charmed house, and whose coming might be the coming of doom for me, if not for all of us!

"Having completed her mysterious toilette to the minutest particular, as if for a hurried journey, Garda, still with that frightfully deadly look in her face, swept out of the room, leaving the door open behind her.

"Though her step was noiseless as a phantom's, I knew instinctively that she was gone to admit her enslaving mentor into the house.

"Ten minutes or so elapsed, when I became aware of her returning steps by perceiving the passages beginning to light up, jet after jet, and I already knew that she must now be accompanied by the hypnotizer, after admitting her by the front door.

"From the individual accounts that you gentlemen have given me, I can now infer that the detention may have been caused by the kindling of the incendiary fire under the main stair-case. But, of course, at the time I was wholly in suspense. It struck me as even possible that my fellow inmates of the mansion were, perhaps, being systematically murdered, one by one, as a ghastly preliminary to a similar disposition of myself.

"This horrible supposition was, however, dispelled when Garda at last re-entered the room, followed by the triumphant Madelaine.

"The latter threw but one glance at me—a furiously malignant one—and then, turning, she pressed into the grasp of her spell-prompted companion an object which I perceived to be a small poniard.

"This is well," she said, in a low voice. "Go! And, as Garda once more glided away, firmly clutching the weapon, and with that murderous expression deepened and intensified in her bushed face, Madelaine threw out her left hand after her with a quivering gesture, whose suggestiveness of remorseless, invisible omnipotence I understood only too well, from my experience of its exertion upon myself under the oak tree in Walsingham in Mr. Bardine's company.

"Then, slowly and deliberately, the terrible woman turned her regards upon me.

"Her aspect, as she did so, was indescribably awful, and yet none the less beautiful for that.

"Dally resentment and scorn were its chief

expression, mingled with the strained, painfully concentrated look which indicated her occult magnetic force as being exerted to a degree that seemed almost self-shattering upon her physical organization as its instrumental medium.

"Woman—marplot!" she hissed at me through her clinched teeth—and yet with a sort of melodious even in her rage; "you have crossed my path, henceforth you must die! You shall never enjoy the fortune which those papers in your bosom would place at your disposal. I must have them—quick!"

"Spellbound as I was, the sound of her voice, together with the thought of losing again the title-deeds to my rightful inheritance—and she had divined truly as to their being concealed in my bosom—momentarily relaxed her paralyzing power upon me."

"I gave utterance to my protest in a great cry, and staggered to my feet."

"Instantly, however, Madelaine drew from her bosom another small, slender-bladed dagger, apparently similar to the one with which she had armed Garda, and precipitated herself upon me with the force of a demoness."

"I managed to evade her first spring, and to cry out once again."

"Then I felt the weapon enter my side, and began sinking down upon the floor, not doubting that I had received my death-wound."

"Even before I could fall, Madelaine clutched at me, and began tearing open the bosom of my gown."

"She was thus engaged when I lost consciousness; though, had not the spell of her occult power repossessed me, I would have resisted her while a breath of life was remaining in my body."

"But resistance was past; dream and truth flowed from me; and I knew no more."

Such was Marion's extraordinary contribution to the tale of that night of terror and dismay.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### MADAME LEGRANDE.

No sooner was Marion Douglass's story completed than Falconbridge announced his intention of at once seeking out the "magnetic healer," Madame Legrande, as a first clew to tracking the whereabouts of Madelaine Valdemar, and requested that Dr. Cheatham should accompany him on the quest.

Nothing could have pleased the old physician better, and he said so.

"All right!" interposed Mr. Bardine, also rising; "I shall go with you."

But here the detective cast an appealing look at Marion, who, quick to understand, retained in her own hand which the master of Redwood had not yet withdrawn from her clasp, after congratulating her at the conclusion of her story.

"Would you all go?" she murmured, earnestly. "However, the butler and coachman will still be left with me, to say nothing of the female servants."

Mr. Bardine flushed.

Even without her spoken appeals, she presented a sufficiently pretty and pathetic picture as she reclined there, with her white face and handsome eyes, still betraying so much suffering, and that certainly not for her own sake.

"Forgive me, Marion!" he naturally murmured. "I shouldn't have needed that rebuke to remain with you."

"Rebuke, indeed! What can you mean? No, no; I can get along very well with Miss Phillips."

But he remained, nevertheless, much to the secret satisfaction of both the detective and the physician, who no longer delayed their departure.

"A good idea of yours, that!" commented the latter when they had quitted the house. "Even now I wouldn't risk having Bardine any distance from Marion's womanly influence, with the memory of our arch she-devil's fascinations to, perhaps, repossess his imagination at any moment."

"Neither would I."

"But hold on!" And Cheatham suddenly paused, catching his companion's arm.

"What now?"

"A miserable thought! Suppose Madelaine should venture back to the Grange in our absence?"

"The possibility has also occurred to me, but dismiss it from your mind as I have done. No danger of it."

"But that woman must be equal to anything."

"Make yourself easy. She will scarcely attempt it, and even the possibility will be provided against."

"How?"

"I have already cautioned John Henry and Jacob Smith, who may safely bid defiance to the hypnotizer's arts in broad daylight and when wide awake and thoroughly on their guard. Moreover, in less than fifteen minutes Officer Kelly, or some equally competent policeman, will be on special guard over the premises."

"I already breathe freer. The deuce! you seem to think of everything, Falconbridge. Do you think you can hunt up this Madame Legrande?"

"Yes; Tommy Dodd may know something of her whereabouts."

"Do you know the woman?"

"Not under her present name, but I am in hopes that she may prove an old acquaintance."

They had now arrived at the Sphinx Detective's cottage, and Tommy Dodd admitted them.

"There is work for you, my lad," said Falconbridge, with his customary abruptness.

"In the language of the immortal Shakespeare, my liege," responded the little fellow, with his profoundest homage and in his stagiest voice, "'tis the cheese that likes me well."

"What do you know of a clairvoyante calling herself Madame Legrande?"

"Everything worth knowing, boss. We knew her of old, and in other scenes than these, as Madame La Comtesse de Rataplan."

"Hallo! Rataplan and Legrande are one and the same!"

"The identical same petticoated dead-beats, my sovereign liege."

"Good! Legrande's address?"

"Harlem; Tenth avenue and 126th street; her shingle is there."

"Excellent! Go to the police station at once, and request in my name a special officer for guard over the Redwood premises. Officer Kelly preferred, if off duty. Mr. Bardine will make it all right. You are to assist in the espionage. If Madelaine puts in an appearance, she is to be arrested forthwith. Apart from that, with anything suspicious in the wind, you are to seek Doctor Cheatham and me at the Legrande den without delay. If not, you are to await our return, and then report. That will do."

The boy darted away with his accustomed unquestioning promptitude.

The detective knitted his brows.

"I am considering," he said, "whether I had better go in disguise or not. No; better as it is, I think."

He then led the way out of the cottage, locked the door, and the pair at once proceeded to the clairvoyante's address.

Madame Legrande occupied the second floor of a tall, isolated flats or apartment house, of which it subsequently appeared that she was likewise the proprietor, but with all the other occupants of the building she was more or less mysteriously connected.

Thus, the first or ground floor was occupied by a wizened little old German apothecary, who was understood to be her cousin and deeply in her confidence, and whose laboratory enjoyed a somewhat uncanny reputation in the neighborhood. This individual was known as Herr Weismann. Then the third floor was occupied by "Mrs. Gotbold, Midwife," according to the sign-board in juxtaposition to the clairvoyante's own at the side of the staircase entrance and she was also reputed as something of a wise woman in her way, together with having some underhand or occult connection with her landlady. Then in the fourth or topmost flat there lived in solitary and somewhat mysterious seclusion, a handsome Jew, Dr. Raphael by name, who was ostensibly a peddler of cheap jewelry, but who was out and in his apartments at unaccountable hours, and concerning whom there were strangely diverse speculations outside of the "queer house," as the entire tenement had come to be known throughout the district.

In fact, next to Madame Legrande, the clairvoyante-magnetic-healing proprietress herself, this Dr. Raphael was generally conceded to be the most mysterious occupant of the mysteriously-tenanted building. He was either a Spanish-American patriot, a Nihilistic Russian prince in hiding, a secret agent of socialistic dynamiters, an innocent watch-peddler, a disguised burglar, the clairvoyante's secretly pensioned natural son, or her latest undivorced husband in melancholy retirement, according to the hearsay report that was given ear to on the subject, though all were agreed that he was a remarkably handsome, silent and interesting personage.

Such was the reputation of the "queer house," as culled by the Sphinx Detective and his companion, from a police acquaintance of the former, immediately prior to their presenting themselves in the vestibule entrance at the side of the little *Deutsche Apotheke* of Herr Weismann, who had been seen to remark their approach through a pair of enormous spectacles, which made him look essentially owlish, as he solemnly contemplated them from behind his professional window.

Falconbridge was about to touch the bell indicated as communicating with Madame Legrande's apartments when the door opened, and a large, superbly handsome man of foreign aspect, silkily black-bearded and with melancholy dark eyes of strange and solemn expressiveness, stepped out, and was about to pass, with a polite bow, when the detective courteously detained him.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, "but can you tell me if Madame Legrande is at home and disengaged?"

The man seemed to comprehend with some difficulty, which necessitated a repetition of the question.

"De great madame is in, I bresume," he then managed to reply, in the worst of broken English; after which he majestically passed on,

with a condescending bow for the little apothecary in passing.

The detective who had unceremoniously passed through the doorway, gave his companion a significant wink.

"Doctor Raphael, or Mystery Number 1," he said in a low voice. "Now let us see what we can do with her ladyship, Mystery Number 2."

Passing up a neatly-kept staircase, the visitors came to a pause before the door of the second floor, front room, bearing an elegant plate with the legend, "MADAME LEGRANDE, CLAIRVOYANTE AND MAGNETIC HEALER," are production of the larger out-door sign below.

Upon knocking for admission, the door was opened, and a singularly graceful female figure, whose face was completely veiled, stood before them.

"Enter!" was all she said, after a brief but scrutinizing survey of the visitors.

As they followed her into a large, richly-furnished room, the door noiselessly but firmly closed behind them without being touched.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

#### THE CLAIRVOYANTE'S DEN

The clairvoyante parted the folds of a voluminous and costly *portiere* of green and crimson material, and introduced her visitors into an inner chamber, more softly lighted and of even richer appointments than the first.

Here, after motioning them to be seated, she sunk into an indolent, half-reclining attitude upon a sort of throne-chair or raised divan, of most luxurious fashioning and surroundings, where she had at her elbow an exquisitely-carved burl-table, upon which were a gold-mounted human skull, polished to ivory whiteness, a small hand-mirror, a pack of playing cards, and an antique lighted lamp, whose steady, star-like luster, diffused through a porcelain shade or globe, furnished the agreeable light with which the sanctum was provided.

Mysticism, combined with luxuriosness, was evidently the effect intended by the general aspect of the apartment, and not without success.

So much of the shapely, prettily-slipped feet of the seeress as were visible from under the listlessly-falling, statuesque folds of her rich robe, were buried in a tiger-skin rug of Oriental fashioning; her white hands, in one of which she languidly trifled with a gorgeous feather-fan, while the other drew her silvery vail more jealously about her neck and bust, were glittering with costly rings; and the pendants at her ears occasionally revealed glimpingly from behind the shimmering fleeciness of her vail, were of antique suggestiveness recalling the Shakespearean lines:

"Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of Night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear."

But, in spite of all this, there was nothing Sibylline, but something refreshingly unexpected, in Madame Legrande's greeting words as soon as her visitors had settled themselves in their luxurious seats before her.

"You are shrewd in calling upon me in your dilemma, Mr. Falconbridge," she said, in the rich, melodious voice that was not unlike the hypnotizer's own. "It is even more than likely that I can put you on the track of the woman whom you seek."

"Hallo! and thanks to you, ma'm," cried the detective, fairly startled out of his equanimity by this unlooked-for straightforwardness. "This is agreeable! But whom do you imagine that I seek?"

"I don't imagine, I know. You seek Madelaine Valdemar."

"True, ma'm; and this is my friend, Dr. Cheatham"—she slightly inclined her head, as the old physician bowed with his cynical courtliness, so to speak—"who is my companion in the quest that you have divined so readily."

"Of course."

"Shall you then give us the information we so much desire?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Upon whether you make it sufficiently worth my while."

"Ah!" and the detective indulged in one of his low-voiced, but metallic and disagreeable laughs; "we shall see about that. Madame, it is my custom to study the face of whomsoever I confer with."

"And it is my custom to remain veiled on all occasions."

"You will depart from it on this occasion."

"Why, indeed?"

"Madame La Comtesse de Rataplan, I command it!"

The woman hesitated, and then, without further protest, took off her vail.

"So," with a musical laugh. "I doubt if you could help being brutally masterful, if you were to try, Falconbridge."

The face revealed was a remarkable one, in connection with its physical belongings—the face of an old but still darkly beautiful woman in connection with a figure and chevelure so admirably 'made up' or preserved as to suggest the undeteriorated prime of voluptuous womanhood and grace.

"Thanks!" said the detective, quite genially. "And you are really holding your own remarkably well, countess."

"I have dropped my coat of arms long since, my friend."

"Just as effectually as you did the old Scotch miser, in New Orleans, when you could not get him to make over his money to you?"

"Yes," coldly.

"Dropped him, though, without dreaming of his falling a victim to the assassin's knife of Juan Valdemere?"

"Certainly," with a slight shiver, "without dreaming of that."

"And you are still comparatively fresh. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years seem to have scarcely withered you."

"What do you want of me, Falconbridge?" demanded the Sibyl, half-savagely.

"To convince you, in the first place, that I am your master."

"Good, then; that goes."

"But I want to be sure. That mysteriously handsome Nihilist prince, Doctor Raphael, whom Doctor Cheatham and I met at the lower entrance?"

"What of him?"

"That is what I want to make sure of from you."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Is he your New Orleans boy-companion of so long ago?"

"Yes."

"Your son by the big Russian, your counterfeiter husband, who died under a detective's bullet at Opelousas?"

"Yes."

"This Doctor Raphael—"

"Leave him alone," half-angrily, half-pleadingly. "The man is an inoffensive student, who need not trouble your reflections."

"I hope so, at least. However, now as to the little old apothecary?"

"You are right about him, too. He was connected with my shady career in the past, but is no longer, other than being my tenant, and advertising me and my clairvoyant pretensions on occasion. As for my present career, it is no longer especially shady, Falconbridge. I simply make my living out of fools, who enter my traps with their eyes wide open, and if I thrive at it, that is my own concern."

"Good! and Mr. Gotbold, the midwife, whom I have not yet set eyes on to-day?"

"She is my sister, who was with me in the past. I hope you are contented, Falconbridge."

"I am, Legrande!" quite heartily. "And you shall lose nothing by your commendable frankness of to-day. You knew the Valdemere woman in New Orleans?"

"Yes, and elsewhere. Wait!"

There had come a knock on the door of the adjoining room, and, composed by resuming her veil, Madame Legrande went to answer it.

"Come in the afternoon, and I shall be at your service—not before," they overheard her say, peremptorily. "Just as you please, then, ma'm. I am at present engaged."

Then there was the sound of a rustling exit, suggestive of no little indignation, of the opening and closing of the door, and the clairvoyante rejoined her visitors in the sanctum.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### THE CLEW.

"I'll retain my veil now, if you have no further objection," said Madame Legrande, resuming her divan.

"None whatever," gallantly replied the detective. "By the way, wasn't your visitor of just now a fashionable lady?"

"Yes." And the clairvoyante indifferently mentioned a name sufficiently representative in the world of fashion and great wealth.

"What! you can afford to treat such an applicant so unceremoniously?"

"Mrs. —— will be eager enough to call again," and the words were accompanied by a soft, contemptuous laugh from behind the shimmering veil. "It is not only that I shall be of yet more service to her than heretofore, but—with an expressive downward gesture of the thumb—"you understand?"

"Humph! perhaps so."

The old physician, on his part, simply smiled, and, if he had at first deemed his companion's methods with the Sibyl as unnecessarily brusque or severe, he was evidently now of a different impression.

The detective abruptly resumed his cross-examining manner.

"So you have known Madelaine from 'way back?" he went on.

"Yes."

"Intimately?"

"Rather."

"Has she been in communication with you, more or less, since her employment in the household of Mr. Walsingham Bardine?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see her?"

"This morning at daybreak."

"What?"

"It is true."

"State the circumstances of her visit."

"She was accompanied by the young girl with whom I had seen her once before. Madelaine was anxious to obtain secluded lodgings in my house, but I had none unoccupied. I gave her small bank bills for a large one, and, after remaining but a few minutes, she hurried away."

"Whither?"

"I do not know."

"I should prefer, countess, seeing your face, as before, while questioning you."

"Falconbridge, I am telling you the truth, and would not dare to do otherwise. You must know that. But I shall not avail again; make the most of it."

There was the ring of sincerity, no less than of temper, in her voice, and the detective made an assenting gesture.

"Did they come and go in a carriage?" was his next query.

"Yes; in a close coach."

"Can you describe the equipage, or its driver, more particularly?"

"No. I saw them drive away from my front windows in yonder, but no more; and the morning light was still very dim."

"Shall you be likely to see Madelaine again, and soon?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Humph! how soon, think you?"

"Within a few days, or a week, at the furthest. Madelaine cannot do without me for long."

"Pray explain, countess."

"My name is now Legrande, as I have already had the felicity of informing you."

"Good for you, Legrande! Explain, then, why Madelaine cannot do without you for long."

"In a magnetic way. I can supplement her powers as no one else can, that she knows of, in the instrumental sense."

"Oh!"

"It is true. And then, in return, she can assist me in the practice of my magnetic pretensions."

"Pretensions?"

"Yes."

"They are but pretensions, then?"

"In my case, yes."

"But in Madelaine's?"

"They are a real gift—a genuine and terrible power."

"Then you do not think there is any danger of Madelaine trying to slip off abroad?"

"I am sure there is not."

"Why do you think so?"

"Madelaine is no ordinary adventuress. Having once marked this wealthy Mr. Bardine as her own (especially if she loves him, which is probably the fact), she will never relinquish the determination to make herself his wife while life remains."

"Well," coldly, "are you with me in this matter, Legrande, or are you against me?"

"What do you want?"

"Madelaine in my power, and the restoration to her friends of this young girl companion of hers—her victim, in fact—back under Mr. Bardine's protection."

"This shall be done, through my help," the Sibyl replied, after a thoughtful pause, "if—you make it worth my while."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," composedly. "And you might as well understand that I am generally looking for big money, or none."

"Mr. Bardine is rich—and generous; to say nothing of his heart being knit up in the recovery of his adopted child. That is all I am at liberty to promise."

"It is too vague."

"My dear Legrande," with the steely peremptoriness again in his voice, "it must answer you in the present instance."

"It shall not!"

"You would defy my commands?"

"Yes, in this instance. Oh, I can afford it! My dead past has sufficiently buried its dead, I think."

"You might find yourself mistaken in that request. However, countess—Legrande, I mean—you and I should not quarrel over a technicality of terms. What do you demand?"

"Let Mr. Bardine come here and make his own terms with me—if he can."

"Is that the best you will do?"

"Yes." And the Sibyl forthwith arose.

"Well; and when shall I bring Mr. Bardine to you?"

"Whenever you please—after to-day."

"But in the interim?"

"What of that?"

"How do I know that you will not communicate with Madelaine in the mean time—that you will keep good faith with me, in fact?"

"You don't and can't know, but must take your chances. Good-by, Falconbridge."

"Hold on! Set a time for me to introduce Mr. Bardine to your august acquaintance."

"To-night, then, at nine o'clock. Bear in mind distinctly, though, that you are not to be present at the interview."

"Oho!"

"Shall I expect to confer with your Mr. Bardine to-night, or not?"

"Yes."

This terminated the interview.

Falconbridge and his companion had hardly turned the first street-corner, after quitting the woman's presence, when they were overtaken by Master Tommy Dodd, who had evidently been on the lookout for them.

"What is up at the Grange?" demanded the detective.

"Big William is roaming about there, like a man in a dream."

"Good! we shall attend to him."

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

##### AT THE GRANGE.

AFTER Tommy Dodd had given some particulars regarding the big footman's reappearance at the Grange, the detective said:

"Tommy, my man, how can you set yourself to watch the front of the clairvoyante's house?"

"Easy enough, boss," was the prompt reply. "The beer-jerker, whose saloon is directly across the way from it, is an old friend of mine, and I can make a lookout of any one of his upper windows that I choose. But watching the front of the madame's house won't amount to much, my liege."

"Why?"

"You noticed that the yard backed against the rough cliff caused by that new grading in progress?"

"Yes."

"That speaks for itself, boss."

"True. Secret communication might be had by half a dozen ways in the rear there."

"I'll make my headquarters in the saloon, then, boss, and now and then take a look at madame's rear doors, too. How will that do?"

"It will have to do."

The detective consulted his watch.

"Noon-day," he said. "Station yourself at once, my lad. I shall join you at five or six this evening."

The boy hurried away with these instructions.

"How do you account," asked Dr. Cheatham, on the way back to the Grange, "for William's reappearance at Redwood?"

"Madelaine must have succeeded in getting rid of him before entering upon her last grand *coup* of last night!" was the reply, "and we shall probably find him harmlessly dazed or delirious over his hard luck. But let us wait and see for ourselves."

"You were unable to wholly intimidate the clairvoyante, it seems."

Falconbridge grew thoughtful, while indicating a half-assent to this.

"What do you think of that woman?" he asked.

"A bold and clever charlatan, who might be as dangerous as Madelaine herself, but for the fact that she is a charlatan."

"A fairly good estimate of the countess, that! Well, the case stands just about thus. The woman really is afraid of me, and knows that I could effectually ruin her general business, if I chose. But she also knows that this would take time and painstaking on my part, with perhaps nothing to especially advantage me for my trouble. This enables her to defy me to a certain extent but no further. It must all depend on Bardine now, and what he will offer her."

"What is the woman's general business as you call it?"

"You marked the fashionable Mrs. ——'s call upon her during our *seance*!"

"Yes."

"There you are, then. Heaven pity the rich or trusting woman who flutters into the blackmailing clutches of Madame La Contesse de Rataplan, alias Legrande, that is all!"

"Ab, I understand. And the rest of the tenants of her queer house, about whom you questioned her so sharply?"

"Well, you have only to draw your own inferences. A mysteriously knavish lot, the entire bunch of 'em, and a nest that I may some time take into my head to stir up with a sharp stick, on general principles, even if our running our hypnotizer to earth in that quarter shouldn't get them into a tangle that they might well wish themselves out of."

They got back to Redwood in time for luncheon, but before entering the mansion were treated to an odd spectacle, which, however, might have been more or less anticipated.

It was that of Kelly, the policeman, rather conspicuously posted on the driveway, curiously watching the huge Corkney, who was motionlessly seated on the piazza steps, his eyes fixed upon the ground, his brow corrugated, his lips moodily moving.

"He's clean gone daft, but harmless, I think, sir," said the guardian, as Falconbridge and his companion approached. "Still, I'd have taken him in on the jump, but the master of the place thought it unnecessary as yet."

"It was probably as well," replied the detective. "How long has the man been in this condition?"

"Oh, for an hour or more. But he seemed jaded and wild-like from the first, as if he might have been wandering around aimlessly for a day or two, with hardly a break."

As they approached the piazza, Mr. Bardine stepped out from the house.

"What am I to do with the poor fellow, who is certainly hardly responsible for his unfortunate condition."

The detective signed him to leave the matter in his hands, and then, going up to the man, laid a gentle but firm touch on his shoulder.

"Look up, William, my man!" he said. "What is the trouble with you?"

The giant started and looked up. Then, as his dazed eyes encountered the detective's piercing glance, he became partly collected, it would seem.

"Trouble!" he ejaculated, passing a huge hand wanderingly over his brow. "God knows, sir; but I feel all lost! Where am I, Mr. Falconbridge?"

Falconbridge slapped him on the back, and burst into a good-natured laugh.

"What, old fellow!" he cried; "you've been having a night off, with too much beer, I fancy. Isn't that it?"

"I don't know," slowly.

"Go up to your room, and have a good sleep! That will set you up. What do you say to it?"

William at once arose.

"Thank you, sir," he muttered, submissively.

"Maybe that is what bails me."

He made his dreamy obeisance to Mr. Bardine, and started into the house, but paused irresolutely on the threshold and turned.

"Wait!" he cried, a kind of glimmering fury struggling into his dazed stolidity. "I aven't found 'er yet—Miss Valdemar, you know. I must 'unt 'er hup, you know."

"Not at present, old fellow! Some other time. Come along!" And Falconbridge, who had linked arms with him, forthwith led him out of sight.

A little later, when William had been put to bed under the coachman's care, and when a sleeping draught had been administered, Mr. Bardine, Dr. Cheatham, the detective and Mrs. Douglass sat down to lunch together, the handsome housekeeper having already rallied wonderfully from her injuries; and while the repast was in progress the visit to the clairvoyante was duly described and discussed.

"Of course, I'll accompany you to the woman this evening," said the master of Redwood at last. "I must get Garda out of Madelaine's clutches at any cost, and the sooner the better."

Oddly enough, the only opposition to the plan came from Marion.

On being finally asked for her opinion, she said, quite decidedly:

"From what you tell me of this Madame Legrande, I opine that she must be a treacherous and unsafe person. If I were you, Walsingham, I would have just nothing to do with her."

"But, my dear Marion," Mr. Bardine's love-making had progressed famously, it will be seen, "what harm can come of my merely conferring with the woman, and judging of her willingness and ability to aid me?"

"I don't know. But I feel instinctively that barm of some sort will come to you—that, in one way or another," with a slight blush, "you will be placed once more in communication with that—other woman."

Before Mr. Bardine could answer, there was the sound of high voices in the adjoining hall, and then Jacob Smith, the fat butler, looking greatly scandalized, put in an appearance.

"Sir," said he, "here is that low person what calls himself Strathspey insisting on seeing you at once."

Mr. Bardine was coloring with indignation when Falconbridge interposed in a low voice, saying:

"We have finished our repast. Why not have the rascal in here, and leave me to deal with him?"

The butler accordingly received instructions to this effect, and then Mr. Strathspey, partly intoxicated and in a new suit of ready-made garments, swaggered into the apartment, with no little insolence in his manner.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

##### FRESH COMPLICATIONS.

BEFORE the intruder could say a word, however, he was summarily taken in hand by the Sphinx Detective with diplomatic earnestness.

"Welcome, Mr. Strathspey, welcome!" cordially exclaimed the detective, springing up, and grasping the fellow by the collar. "Aren't you rejoiced to see how welcome you are?"

And with almost every word he raised up and squashed the man down again and again upon a hard chair, the only one of the sort in the room, with a force that threatened to dislocate his spine.

"Hold on!" gasped Strathspey, fairly sobered, but woefully rattled, and struggling in vain to release himself. "I say, you're jogging the life out of me. Oh!"

"No, no! I'm only so glad to see you again, that is all. There you are!" And with a last 'jog' the fellow was settled in the seat, looking half-pulverized. "Now then, My dear Mr. Strathspey, to what are we indebted for the excruciating honor of this visit?"

"Excruciating! yes, I should say so!" and the miserable fellow felt himself over bewilderedly amid the derisive laughter of the others, with

the exception of Marion, who remained grave and disturbed. "Oh, laugh and jeer, if you will, all of you! It would serve you right if I should take myself off without opening my lips as to Miss Garda's whereabouts."

"What do you know?" demanded Mr. Bardine, roughly.

"He knows just nothing at all!" interposed the detective, who had calmly resumed his seat, and was now facing the intruder in his magisterial manner. "Or at least, with your leave, sir, I'll soon find out. Now, my man," to Strathspey, who was slowly recovering his assurance, "what do you know?"

"Everything!"

"Ah, indeed! And why should you infer that Miss Garda is once again missing?"

"I don't infer anything, I know it."

"Why?"

"Because I was on the box of the coach in which she was carried off an hour or two before daybreak of to-day."

"Ah! you were the driver, eh?"

"No, I wasn't; but I sat alongside the driver."

"Who carried off the young lady?"

"Her mother, Madelaine Valdemere."

"Where was Big William?"

"He wasn't anywhere; didn't see him."

"How did you manage to be with the driver?"

"That is my business, not yours. But she didn't recognize me, as a matter of course."

"Well, where did Madelaine take the girl?"

"That is what I know, and you don't."

"You're out there, my man. They drove to a house in Tenth avenue, near 126th street."

Strathspey looked somewhat disconcerted, but he quickly rallied.

"I see you know something, but not a great deal," he said. "They did go there, but only to remain a short time. We then drove them to their real destination."

"Where was that?"

"Aha! don't you really wish you knew?"

"Do you know?"

"I'll swear I do!"

"What is your secret worth?"

"One thousand dollars."

The detective seemed to be considering the proposition, and carelessly stepped to the window.

Kelly, the policeman, was once more at his post, after having gone for some luncheon, which explained how Strathspey had entered the grounds without interception.

Falconbridge signaled to him, and, after perceiving that he was understood, quietly resumed his seat.

"A thousand dollars, Strathspey," he said, "is a good deal of money."

"Mine is a good deal of a secret," replied the man, insolently.

"But we're not so sure of that."

"All right; do as you please about paying for it."

"Hold on!" for Strathspey had risen and taken up his hat. "Suppose Mr. Bardine refuses to treat with you for this alleged secret, what will you do?"

"I'll see what it is worth to Madelaine herself."

"Strathspey, you are a blundering ass!"

"What makes you think so, Mr. Falconbridge?"

"You have already done your best to treat with the adventuress, and failed. Do you take me for such a shallow fool as not to have divined this much?"

Strathspey at once began a string of denials and protestations, but was cut short by the unceremonious entrance of Officer Kelly.

"Same charge as formerly—attempted blackmail," observed the Sphinx Detective, blandly. "Mr. Bardine will appear in due season to formulate the charge."

Strathspey had sprung to his feet with an oath, but the policeman's heavy hand was already on his shoulder, and in spite of his continued protestations, he was forthwith buried away.

"Of course, I am glad to get rid of the pestiferous fellow," commented Mr. Bardine. "But still, Falconbridge, might he not have guided us direct to Madelaine's place of hiding?"

"Might, yes; if not already in her pay to mislead us."

"Oh! but you yourself thought he might already have approached Madelaine unsuccessfully."

"Pardon me, no; I only told Strathspey I thought so. The man is utterly untrustworthy, and is jugged again for the present—out of the way of working mischief, one way or the other; and there is an end of it."

"But we must still treat with this Legrande woman; and is she more trustworthy than this Strathspey?"

"She is more capable of serving us, if she will, while the man is generally of small or no account."

"Suppose we adjourn for a smoke, and talk this matter over deliberately. I am as yet undecided what course to pursue."

But when Dr. Cheatham and the detective quitted the dining-room, in accordance with this suggestion, Mr. Bardine, notwithstanding

that he had proposed it, excused himself to them, with some little embarrassment, and lingered behind in obedience to an appealing sign from Marion.

"She seems strongly averse to his keeping the appointment we made for him with the clairvoyante," observed the physician, in the smoking-room.

"No wonder," replied Falconbridge. "A good woman's instincts quickly take the alarm at the prospect of a lover and vice coming in contact."

"Ab! and they are very loverlike already, by the way."

"And might have been long ago, but for the hypnotizing witch that is leading us all such a dance. The fair widow is sensible enough not to wish Bardine again exposed to Madelaine's enchantments; and she naturally connects the latter with Legrande. However, Bardine must not back out from meeting the clairvoyante tonight."

"So I think. For, indeed—with this chap Strathspey altogether out of the question—I don't see what other outlook he has of recovering poor Garda, without making a sensational publicity of the entire affair."

Falconbridge assented to this, and here they were rejoined by Mr. Bardine, who was looking annoyed, but resolute.

"Marion is dead set against my going with you to the Legrande woman this evening," said he, "and seems to imagine all sorts of fresh bad luck as the possible result. But I must recover Garda, and with the least possible delay."

"What shall you do?" demanded the detective, with his usual bluntness.

"Why not take Marion along with us?" asked Mr. Bardine, with equal abruptness.

"Oh, come now, Walsingham!" interposed the old physician; "how much of a delegation do you imagine the clairvoyante will submit to?"

But the detective, to Cheatham's surprise, no less than Bardine's relief, said, thoughtfully:

"A good enough idea! Yes, let the lady accompany us; that is, if she will."

"Oh, I'll answer for that!" cried the Master of Redwood, with sudden cheeriness. "You see, her proximity to me during my interview with the new sorceress will doubtless reassure her as to the wiles of the old one being a thing distinct and apart, at least. Now, Falconbridge, what are your instructions as to my manner of dealing with the clairvoyante when alone with her."

"I'll take the liberty of advising you as to that later on, sir," was the reply. "In the mean time, I must see my little man on guard over the 'queer house,' and you can talk the matter over with our medical friend here."

Then Falconbridge set off to keep his appointment with Tommy Dodd, it being now well on in the afternoon.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### TOMMY DODD'S REPORT.

THE day had turned off dark and lowering when the detective rejoined his little assistant, whom he found watching the "queer house" from a room over the beer saloon and restaurant already mentioned as being just across the way from it.

"Well, my boy, what have you discovered?" he demanded.

"Not a great deal, boss," was the reply, "and yet some things you may think worth knowing. You've located the occupants of the different floors of the tenement yonder, of course?"

The detective nodded.

Secure from outside observation, they were at a window overlooking the entire opposite front.

"Yes," said he. "There is the owl-like apothecary on the ground floor. Legrande has the second, with the closely drawn, rich-looking window curtains. The third floor is occupied by her sister, Mrs. Gotbold, the midwife. And Doctor Raphael, the Nihilistic prince or what not, smokes cigarettes and plots political cataclysms in the last one up."

"Right you are, my liege! But is the Gotbold woman the seeress's sister?"

"Yes; and the Raphael man her son."

"Hallo! and the little old apothecary the grandpa of the crowd, perhaps?"

"Hardly that, I fancy," said the detective. "But he has his distinctive place in the Happy Family, you may depend upon it."

"Oh, yes; I know that already."

"How have you discovered it, Tommy?"

"The whole lot of 'em are great on their beer, boss."

"Well?"

"And they're in the habit of taking it, together with a Dutch dinner, in the Gotbold rooms, every day at one o'clock."

"Well?"

"The landlord of the saloon below supplies the grub and the lush."

"Yes?"

"And I was the white-aproned waiter-boy that attended to the noon festivities of to-day."

"Ah, I begin to understand."

"Well, boss, they're a rum lot."

"Were they all together in the Gotbold rooms?"

"All, sooner or later, even including Herr Weismann. There's his shop-boy over yonder now. I suppose he took care of the pill-boxes and poison jars while the old chap was up-stairs hobnobbing with the rest."

"And you were present in the character of restaurant-attendant?"

"Yes; and just as dumb and stupid as the regular Dutch boy to whom they had been accustomed, I'll warrant you. He had fallen sick for the occasion, you must mind; and old Kopler—he's the proprietor below and my friend, as I once told you of, boss—had helped me to rig up as a substitute."

"How long were you over there?"

"As long as the lunch and beer lasted, which was the best part of an hour."

"Quite confidential among themselves, eh?"

"All of that, my liege."

"What did you make out from their conversation?"

"Not a syllable."

"Ah! too foreign for you, eh?"

"Worse than foreign, boss; Russian or Japanese, I should say. Now and then there would be just enough English to make me cock up my ears, but only to drop 'em down again as they'd go galloping off among their original jaw-breakers. I was mad enough to swear, though, of course, I didn't. There ought to be a law against every lingo but English and Bowery Dutch!"

"But there isn't, you know."

"More's the pity!"

"Still, you must have made some inference from observation?"

"I should say I did."

"Well, what did you make out of them?"

"In the first place, that they're all in some mysterious racket together, with Legrande as the queen be of the hive."

"I knew that much before."

"In one way or another, all the tenants are indirectly tooting the madame's big game."

"Nothing new for me in that, my boy."

"Her big game is to get at the private secrets of rich and fashionable women, through the exercise of her clairvoyance or magnetic healing dodge, and then bleed 'em for all they can stand."

"Chestnuts, chestnuts!"

"All the floors, and even the cellar, are connected by a secret staircase at the back."

"I guessed that much at the start."

"Blast it all, then, boss! the cellar itself communicates with the rough hillside in the rear, and doubtless with the squatter's shanty on top of it by a subterranean passage."

"Come, now," said the detective, laughing; "that will do for a novelty at all events."

"I'm glad of it," growled Tommy Dodd, discontentedly. "Some folks seem to want, not only the whole earth, but all the information on top of it, and at a single clip into the bargain."

"But this isn't on top of it, but underneath, even at your own showing," cried Falconbridge, laughing again. "Come, now, Tommy; see if you can't raise some beer and pretzels from the Gambrinian region below; and then you shall give me your report in full over one of these choice Havanas." And he genially produced a couple of fragrant cigars as he spoke.

Tommy Dodd brightened up wonderfully at the suggestion, which was forthwith carried out; and then he gave a detailed account of the festivities at which he had officiated in the "queer house" across the way.

"How did you manage to find out as to the staircase at the back and the subterranean passage leading out from the cellar?" demanded the detective at last.

"I had to make several trips back and forth for fresh beer," replied the lad, "and interrupted them by making all the explorations I could on the sly."

"But you could not have the opportunity to explore the underground passage itself without exciting suspicion."

"No, boss; I didn't make the attempt."

"Then how do you judge that it penetrates back into the hill?"

"Simply by guess-work and the general direction of the tunnel."

"Ah! May it not be a disused culvert, or something of the sort, utilized by these 'queer house' people for their own ends?"

"Yes, and probably is."

"And there is a squatter's shanty on top of the back-hill, eh?"

"Yes, boss."

"And why do you infer that the underground passage from the 'queer house' might have some connection with the shanty on the rocks?"

"Because of the shanty's occupant, whom I have already spied upon and prudently inquired about."

"Who is the shanty's occupant?"

"A sort of hermit Irishman; a crabbed old junk-collector by day, and the Lord only knows what by night."

"His name?"

"He's got thirty or forty, in all likelihood."

"His original name, to the best of your knowledge?"

"Andrew McAntrim."

The Sphinx Detective gave a start of surprise,

which was equivalent to a leap and exclamation of amazement in a less self-constrained individual.

"The deuce!" he muttered. "McAntrim—the supposed pal of Juan Valdemere in the murder of the Scotch miser—here in New York?"

"Doubtless the same, my liege, from the history of the case as you once gave it to me."

"Wonderful!" continued the detective, half to himself. "And here, too, in close proximity with the old countess and her set, who are Madelaine's friends! How strangely the old criminal fragments piece themselves together after the lapse of years. Come, my little trump card!" rising abruptly. "You can finish that cigar on the way. No time's to be lost."

"All right, my liege!" and Tommy was in readiness. "Are you for the shanty on the rocks?"

"At once; that is, if we can make our way thither without attracting attention from the 'queer house'."

"I'll attend to that, boss. We can quit this building as you entered it, by the back way, and then it is easy enough to reach the Irishman's shanty by a *detour*."

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### THE SHANTY ON THE ROCKS.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when the detective and his doughty little companion approached the shanty under consideration.

It was one of the sort that are still typical of the few remaining and rapidly-disappearing rugged and waste lots of the upper portion of Manhattan Island.

A crazily-reared hut of patchwork materials, in an irregular inclosure made by a yet crazier, more ramshackle fence, with a fierce bulldog kennelled and chained near the cabin door, and even a proverbial goat or two browsing and nibbling near at hand; squalor and shiftlessness everywhere; and the whole affair standing alone on top and partly down one side of the rugged steep, whose speedy removal by the hand of street-grading and general improvement was destined to obliterate the habitation sooner or later, as had been and was yearly being the case with so many of its kind.

On one side the cabin door rested an old handcart, on the other a powerfully-built, dirty and ragged old man, pipe in mouth, who looked up with seeming stolidity as his dog began to bark and bellow in announcement of the visitors climbing up the steep, rocky path from the adjoining street.

"What d'ye want?" growled the old man, his still keen and bright old eyes glittering questioningly from under the shaggy brows.

Instead of responding directly, the detective advanced quietly, even threateningly, with his little follower close behind.

"Have you quite forgotten me, Andy McAntrim?" he asked, with the sharp, unpleasant ring in his voice.

The old man suddenly leaped to his feet, half-terrified and half-defiant.

"Why d'ye sp'ake that name, and who air ye?" he exclaimed.

"Come, come, Andy, none of your bad memory tricks with me!" harshly. "The years may have gone swiftly over our heads, but you cannot have forgotten Falconbridge, the Detective."

"The Falcon Detective!" gasped the squatter, taking the short pipe from between his lips with a trembling hand, and backing half-coweringly against the side of the hut, while still eying the new-comer doubtfully. "Yes, so it is, so it is!" with an oath.

"Silence that bellowing brute, and take us into your den!" peremptorily. "I've been looking for you."

McAntrim sullenly obeyed, silencing the dog with a kick, and leading the way into the squalid interior, which is better imagined than described.

"Well, what d'ye want, Misther Falconbridge?" he demanded, when all were seated, after a fashion. "It's a changed and honest divil I am now-a-days. I've done nothing wrong, me loife bein' passed in poverty an' privation, sir."

"I'll be the judge of that," said the detective. "What does that trap-door, yonder in the corner, indicating the spot, 'conceal?'"

"Och! the thrap-dure, is it?"

"What does it cover?" yet more peremptorily.

"Sure, the entrance to me bit av a cellar, your Honor."

"You're a liar! Raise it up!"

"Och, but you must be jokin', sir! What could ye care to be peekin' into me bit av a cellar, now?"

"Open it, I say!"

The old man made a despairing gesture, and, hobbling across the earthen floor, obeyed without another protest.

The trap-door, on being raised and hooked back, disclosed a flight of rickety wooden steps leading down indefinitely into the darkness.

"What do these steps connect with?" demanded the detective, after a glance down into the cavity.

McAntrim shrugged his shoulders deprecat-

ingly, and then gave a forced, servile sort of laugh.

"Sure," he replied, appealingly, "yez won't be too hard on me if I tell the troot to yez!"

"If you really tell the truth, no, I shall not be hard on you."

"I have a bit of the owld shtuff down there, which I peddle out to the b'ys on the shly, having no license at all, at all, your Honor."

"What an incorrigible old reprobate you are, McAntrim! I don't believe you are capable of telling the truth voluntarily, even by mistake."

"Be the Powers, it is the whole troot I'm afther telling your Honor, and nothing but the troot!"

"You lie! Those steps connect with a passage leading under the hill into the house of Madame Legrande, the clairvoyante, whom you knew of old as the Countess de Rataplan. Own up at once!"

The old fellow would still have prevaricated, but that the detective cut him short with a menacing gesture.

"Scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "Do you forget that justice is still eager to lay her hands on Andrew McAntrim, the whilom confederate of Juan Valdemere, the murderer? Palter with me another instant, and I'll have you in prison forthwith, to answer for your alleged share in his crimes!"

McAntrim tottered back to his chair, and sunk down into it again, conquered and crushed.

"I give in!" he said, desperately. "But it is really the truth, Falconbridge, that I'm no longer in such very great wickedness as formerly. What is it you wish to know?"

Even his brogue had disappeared by this time, and there was a sort of sincerity in his very sullessness.

"All right!" and the detective likewise resumed his seat. "See to it that you do not lapse into falsehood or evasion again. What is the nature of your connection with the 'queer house' on the next street?"

"I'm a sort of secret doorkeeper for the madame, and, when necessary I pilot fine ladies into her presence by means of the underground passage."

"When did you last see Madelaine Valdemere?"

"Seven or eight days ago, I should think."

"Not later than that?"

"No, sir; not later than that," and he really seemed speaking truthfully.

"Did she then visit madame by the secret passage?"

"Yes. She seemed in hard luck, and was desirous of avoiding observation."

"Was she alone?"

"Entirely so."

The detective reflected.

This statement was consistent with what might have happened during Madelaine's first period of hiding away, in company with Garda and Big William; and there would have been no necessity for her to have availed herself of the secret passage since.

But why had she not applied to the Legrande for assistance during that brief period of adversity when she had sent out her hypnotized victims on the thieving expeditions? Or had she so applied in the instance mentioned by McAntrim, but only to fail of success, being then penniless and comparatively powerless?

The latter seemed the more likely supposition, and to this extent was in support of the old fellow's veracity.

"Are you regularly in Madame Legrande's pay?" was the detective's next question.

"Yes," was the grumbled reply; "such as it is."

"How much does she give you?"

"Ten dollars a month."

"What would you do, at my bidding, for ten times that amount, cash in hand?"

"Cut the old girl's throat, if you say so!" cried the hermit of the rocks, eagerly. "Or no!" recovering his equanimity with a laugh; "of course, I don't mean that, Cap. I'm dead honest now."

"And, of course, I don't mean that," sternly. "I would merely demand of you to seize Madelaine, should she appear here again, and hand her over to the police in my name."

"I'll do it, by Heaven, I will!"

"Ah! but can I trust you?"

McAntrim was protesting his trustworthiness when heavy footsteps were heard blundering up the rocky path outside, mingled with fresh bellowings on the part of the watch-dog.

Then the door was unceremoniously opened, and a towering figure entered.

It was William, the great footman, still looking dazed and bewildered.

### CHAPTER XL.

#### THE CLAIRVOYANTE AGAIN.

A SINGLE glance enabled the detective to explain the big footman's unlooked-for presence.

Still dazed, and impelled solely by a haunting desire to revenge himself upon Madelaine, by whom he regarded himself to have been irreparably deceived and wronged, he had, doubtless, made his way, unperceived, out of the Grange, and been guided to this spot through a

hazy recollection of having accompanied her to its vicinity on some former occasion—probably the occasion alluded to by McAntrim, whose word would be thus corroborated afresh.

Accordingly, Falconbridge was now possessed of a happy idea to turn the circumstance to his own account.

He therefore treated William with the utmost kindness, and made him take a seat in the only remaining chair the shanty contained.

Then he made McAntrim produce some whisky, of which he gave the new-comer a liberal dose.

"There you are, William!" he exclaimed, slapping him on the shoulder. "And how are you feeling now?"

William mechanically wiped his lips, and then drew his hand wanderingly over his moody eyes and vacant-looking brow.

"Poorly enough, Mr. Falconbridge, poorly enough," he answered, abstractedly. "You see, sir," firing up like a half-spent torch, "I want 'er!" And his fingers worked convulsively.

"Ah, Madelaine, eh?"

"Yes, by 'Eavings!" striking his knee with his fist in a sort of dreamy rage; "and I'll 'ave 'er, too!"

"That you shall, my man!" cried the detective, heartily. "Look you, you are just in the right place to nab the woman, should she chance this way again."

"Don't I know it? Ha! I was once 'ere with 'er before. That is, she left me at the foot of the 'ill wile she came up, you know."

"Of course and now all you must do is to keep this old gentleman company, to call her to account when she puts in another appearance here to-night. Can I depend on you to do this, my man?"

The giant again brought his fist down, this time on McAntrim's rickety table, with a force that well nigh demolished it.

"Won't I?" he growled, in a strangely intense, satisfied tone. "I'll not stir from this place till I get 'old of 'er! Trust me for that. And she shall never give me the beastly slip again. I'll kill her first!"

"Hold on!" cried the shanty proprietor, who was beginning to think himself *de trop* in the affair. "What's to become of me in this racket?"

"Oh, you're all right, you rascal!" said Falconbridge, genially. "You're merely to boss the watch, so to speak, with our huge friend here as your assistant."

"Humph! to keep watch over me, no less than for the lady what's to be looked after. Eh?"

"And what of it, if your fidelity shall win you the promised hundred dollars, in any event?"

"But shall I depend on that, Mr. Falconbridge?"

"You have my word for it, in case you only contribute reasonably to the woman's capture."

"By Jupiter! I'm your man, then. And if Juan Valdemere's widow chances this way without finding herself in a trap, it sha'n't be the fault of Andy McAntrim. Here, William, as they calls yer; try another snifter of this prime stuff, to keep me company."

But William paid no attention, having relapsed into his dreamy condition, in which he was muttering some jargon to himself.

So the detective, after giving some further instructions as to the duty expected of the pair, went away with Tommy Dodd, leaving them together.

"William's turning up as he did was opportune enough," explained Falconbridge, a few minutes later. "Madelaine will have to enter the 'queer house,' if at all to-night, by the legitimate entrance, or, step into those fellows' clutches."

"But an idea strikes me, boss," suggested Tommy. "Isn't there a risk of the big, daft funky a-murderin' of her off-hand?"

"None whatever, while she retains possession of her hypnotizing power."

"But wouldn't the same power enable her to defy 'em, boss?"

"Hardly, without plenty of time and opportunity being given her; and you are to provide against that."

"Good enough, boss! In what way?"

"You're to fit between the shanty and the beer saloon, and act according to your own judgment, in reporting to me. It is now nearly seven o'clock, and in two hours I am due at the appointment with Madame Legrande."

The pair then separated; and, two hours later, Falconbridge put in an appearance at the clairvoyante's front saloon, accompanied by the party from Redwood Grange, which included Marion Douglass with the others.

Much to the detective's agreeable surprise, the clairvoyante expressed no dissent at the number of her visitors, but calmly assigned them to seats, after the necessary introductions had taken place.

"Sir," she said, in her musical voice, and fixing a keen glance upon Mr. Bardine through her silvery veil, "you distinctly understand, I presume, that our interview is to take place without witnesses."

A grave bow was the assenting response.

"Good!" she continued; "it will then be accorded you in my adjoining sanctum, while your companions tarry here, if they see fit. But wait!"

She abruptly, but with a very graceful movement, drew aside her veil, so that her face was broadly revealed in the bright though softened light from the chandelier under which they were sitting.

"I am according you all an unusual privilege in thus unvailing to you," the Sibyl went on, composedly. "It is in the manner of submitting to a test for your satisfaction. Study me narrowly; for most assuredly another opportunity will not be afforded you."

A slight smile was playing about her thin, but still unwithered lips, perhaps at the perceptible impression already made by the unvailing on both Mr. Bardine and Mrs. Douglass.

Then, baving placidly endured the inspection for a few seconds, she replaced her veil, and saying, "Excuse me now for a moment," she parted the folds of the *portiere*, which were now seen to have hidden a pair of closed folding-doors, which she easily swung back, and then disappeared into her adjoining sanctum, letting the rich curtains come together behind her.

But at this instant the detective, who had been apparently turning over something in his mind, abruptly rose to his feet.

"Wait!" he cried, commandingly; "I am not satisfied, if the others are."

"One moment, please!" musically from behind the *portiere*; "coming!"

Then the curtains parted afresh, and the graceful veiled figure confronted him from the opening.

"Well, sir? I am now ready to confer with the gentleman in private. What is there that you are not satisfied about?"

"I'll tell you better," brusquely, "when I have searched this house from top to bottom."

"Sir!" angrily.

"Oh, yes, ma'm!" indifferently; "but I am going to make sure first that Madelaine Valdemar is not already somewhere concealed hereabouts; in which case your proposed bargaining with Mr. Bardine will be altogether unnecessary."

#### CHAPTER XLI.

##### A SIBYL'S WILES.

THE veiled Sibyl had again entered the room, and stood haughtily among them, the fire of her glance shining resentfully upon the matter-of-fact detective.

"You have made arrangements to this effect?" she demanded.

"I have," coolly replied Falconbridge, who was already at the outer door.

"Proceed, then," contemptuously. "Only, after your search shall have resulted in nothing, as it surely will, it would serve you right were I to withdraw my promise utterly, and refuse to treat with Mr. Bardine for the production of Madelaine Valdemar and the missing girl."

"Your refusal might then be met by an insistence that would render it of very small moment."

The detective then opened the door, stepped across the lighted hallway to the head of the stair, and called down:

"Tommy!"

"Ay, ay, my lord duke!" came back, in Tommy Dodd's ridiculously deep base voice, from below.

"Where are the three policemen who were to have met me hereabouts?"

"At the nearest street-corner, my liege."

"Station one at the front entrance, another at the rear, and come up here with the third. We are about to make a systematic search of the premises."

"Service to your Majesty!" came back the response, and the street-door was heard to open and close.

The detective continuing to tarry in the passage, while these arrangements of his were being carried out, the Sibyl turned slowly and majestically to her remaining visitors.

"You gentlemen should have advised me of this opening courtesy on your part," she said, with quiet contemptuousness. "I would then have known how to receive you with becoming distinction."

"No fault of mine, ma'm!" snapped out the physician. "In fact, Mr. Falconbridge's action takes me as much by surprise as it can yourself."

"Truly, I can say the same on my own part, Madame Legrande," Mr. Bardine hastened to say for himself. "Indeed, was it not that I had left the direction of this interview solely in Mr. Falconbridge's hands—however, the least said the soonest mended now, perhaps."

The Sibyl then turned the fire of her veiled glance questioningly upon the lady visitor.

"And you madam?" with a mocking something in her musical utterance.

"I can only echo Mr. Bardine's chagrin in the matter," said Marion, gently. "It seems an unnecessary courtesy on Mr. Falconbridge's part, so far as I can judge."

"Ah! I thank you." And the mystic gracefully renewed her seat.

"Sha'n't keep you folks any longer than is

necessary," here interposed the detective, appearing momentarily at the door. "Try to be companionable and cheerful in the mean time, please."

And, with that, having been joined by Tommy Dodd and a policeman, he hustled away briskly upon his search.

The remaining apartments of the clairvoyante's own flat were first investigated, not forgetting the luxurious consultation room, but without result; not the slightest trace of any lurking presence being anywhere visible, if we may except several cats that were brought to light in one of the rear rooms.

The apothecary shop and connecting apartments of Herr Weismann, next received the searchers' attention, but with no better result.

"It is outrage dat I s'all rebort to de aut'ories!" calmly commented the little professor, who, with folded arms and a diminutive shop-boy at his heels, followed the investigators from place to place of his premises, while glaring at them with wild indignation through his spectacles. "Gott in Himmell are we in Brussia, or under de desbotism off der Czar, dat such outreheous doings are permidded all der dimes?"

"Don't disturb yourself, mynheer," the detective good-naturedly replied. "You should at least feel grateful to us for the rats and croton-bugs we are bringing to light. Nothing like airing up things now and then, even in the best regulated households."

The searchers next investigated the cellar, but to the revelation of nothing of more consequence than the mouth of the subterranean passage.

"The other end of it is, fortunately, provided for," was the detective's philosophical comment, after a cursory examination of the place. "Tommy, my man, you are the spryest. Take your lantern, and make a run through the tunnel, for a flyer, while we wait for you here."

Revolver in one hand, lantern in the other, Tommy unhesitatingly disappeared into the opening, without a word.

"That boy's a good 'un, Mr. Falconbridge!" observed the policeman in attendance.

"He can't be beat," was the Sphinx Detective's complacent response.

Tommy returned in about ten minutes, reporting that, to the best of his knowledge, the passage was very damp and very empty.

He had penetrated to the bottom of the steps leading up to the trap-door of the shanty on the rocks, in which he had heard McAntrim singing convivial songs, presumably for the delectation of the dreamy footman and over the whisky bottle.

"That will do," said the detective. "We'll try higher up."

Mrs. Gotbold's rooms, on the third floor, were the next ones visited.

The midwife proprietress, an enormously corpulent old woman of a flushed face and angry eye, had evidently received some intimation of their coming, and was disposed to be rather sarcastic than belligerent, with a mixture of both.

"Keep inside your skin, my good woman!" counseled the imperturbable detective, while the search of the apartments was in progress. "Who knows but we might discover a pot of gold somewhere, never even suspected by yourself or any one else. You can't always sometimes tell just what may turn up," with a deprecating smile, "in these star-chamber investigations."

"If Madame Legrande doesn't sue you for damages, I will!" cried the female mountain, furiously. "The idear of that Valdemar woman being hidden away in this house, like a stuffed doll in a closet! Whoever heard of such a thng?"

"Oho! what cat are you letting out of the sack?" and his penetrating eyes were suspiciously upon her. "How did you know that we were looking for the Valdemar or any other woman, my dear?"

"Find out!" she insolently replied, only momentarily abashed.

"That is just what I intend to do, sooner or later, my dear. But don't make the mistake of considering me one of the youngsters that you are in the habit of assisting into the world, or you may find me like Richard the Third, born with teeth."

However, the search was of no avail; and the investigating trio next and last turned their attention to Dr. Raphael, the handsome and mysterious top-floor occupant, who majestically opened his parlor-door to their summons with a grave look of inquiry upon his face, a cigarette between his lips, and a gold-tasseled fez smoking-cap upon his princely head.

The object of the visit was forthwith explained, and dignifiedly acquiesced in.

"What," demanded the detective, when the search had been completed, with as little avail as in the preceding instances, "is the idea of this dark little back staircase here, that seems to connect the different floors with one another?"

"I doan't know," stolidly replied Dr. Raphael, but with a peculiar smile behind his bearded lips. "I didn't build dis house myself."

"Oh, indeed! but you are the madame's son, are you not?"

"V'at!" with a sort of gasp.

"Never mind, then, my friend. But you were born in this country, I believe?"

"I was, sir; in New Orleans."

"So I thought. Why don't you speak better English than you do, then?"

"Because, sir," calmly, "it doan't suit me to do zo."

"Are you acquainted with a friend of the madame's named Madelaine Valdemar?"

"I am not acquainted with de lady, sir; unt I doan't know nuddlings."

The detective took a lookout over the roof, to make sure of missing nothing, and then, temporarily dismissing his companions, coolly returned to the company in Madame Legrande's drawing-room.

"You can proceed with your interview, ma'm," he blandly announced to the Sibyl. "It is all right."

The woman glared at him through her veil, but did not reply or make any movement.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

##### A SPELL RENEWED.

"I SAY it's all right, ma'm!" repeated the detective, half-angrily. "I have searched the building thoroughly, and am satisfied that Madelaine is not concealed in it."

"Indeed!" witheringly. "Is it possible?"

"Yes; and you can now proceed with your interview as soon as you please."

"Your condescension is truly noble, sir, not to say paralyzing."

She seemed to hesitate, and then, resolutely crossing the floor, once more drew aside the curtains and rolled back the folding-doors.

"Do you think you have the courage to come now?" with a taunting look back over her shoulder at Mr. Bardine. "Or shall you wait for your lady companion's express permission, no less than the Falcon Detective's?"

Mr. Bardine simply expressed his readiness for the interview by rising, without vouchsafing a response to the taunt.

"How long do you think you shall keep us waiting, ma'm?" inquired the detective.

The Sibyl waved her hand impatiently.

"That will depend altogether on Mr. Bardine," she replied. "Have the goodness to follow me, sir."

But, as she was closing the folding-doors behind the master of Redwood and herself, Falconbridge again interposed:

"Pardon me, ma'm! but the closed *portiere* will be sufficient, without the closed doors, I think."

"It will not!" the woman exclaimed, angrily.

"It was enough this morning."

"No matter. Cease your interference with my arrangements, or quit my house this instant, all of you!"

"For shame, Mr. Falconbridge, for shame!" cried Marion. "This is uncalled for!"

Both Mr. Bardine and the old physician joining their censure to hers, the detective sullenly desisted.

"The responsibility be yours, then, not mine!" he growled, as the folding-doors, no less than the curtains, closed behind the disappearing forms.

"The responsibility for what?" snapped out Cheatham.

"For whatever treacherous, dark design may be contemplated against Mr. Bardine when alone with that old witch!"

"Dark fiddlesticks! You yourself have averred that she can be but a pretentious charlatan."

"Why, yes!" said Marion. "And what influence can be feared if you are really satisfied that Madelaine is not in the house?"

"Have your own way!" replied Falconbridge, surlily. "If anything does go wrong, I wash my hands of it."

In the mean time, the Sibyl, after signing Mr. Bardine to a seat, had gracefully sunk upon the rich divan.

The sanctum was softly and voluptuously illuminated, as upon the previous occasion already described, and the rich table, with its belongings, was partly between her and the gentleman.

Almost instantly, as the Sibyl sat silently contemplating him through her shimmering veil, a sense of mingled languor and uneasiness began to possess her visitor.

But he made a determined effort to shake it off.

"I understand, madame," he said with an attempt at brusqueness, "that you offer to restore my adopted daughter to me for a consideration?"

"Yes!" musically and half interrogatively from behind the veil.

"Yes, ma'm; and," with growing uneasiness, "suppose we proceed with the business at once."

"Why?"

"Can you ask? Are we not met for that purpose, ma'm?"

"Perhaps so. But is there any need for haste?"

"Oh, no special need, I suppose."

"Besides, are you particularly uncomfortable here alone with me?"

"Well, no; quite the contrary, perhaps. But then—"

"But what, Mr. Bardine?"

Do as he would, the languorous sense of *laisser faire*, was growing upon him momently. It was as if the veiled figure before him were exhaling a sort of enchantment, to which he felt instinctively that he must sooner or later succumb, if he did not succeed in combating it by some violent effort. And, strangely enough, he was at the same time momently becoming more and more disinclined to the very effort which his reason warned him that he ought to make.

"Well," he stammered, half-weakly and half-angrily, "that is what we are there for, you know."

A low, delicious little laugh from under the veil, causing him to wonder that it could proceed from those well-preserved, but undeniably aged, lips that he had seen revealed, together with the Sibyl's face, from thence.

"I don't know about that. Wait!"

Stretching forth her hand, with an airy gesture, she touched the skull on the table, and the top of it opened, after the manner of a cup-lid.

Taking a pinch of some sort of powder from the cavity thus discovered, the Sibyl scattered the substance, whatever it might have been, over the flame of the lamp at her side.

There was a soft flash, and instantly the room was filled with a delicate pink radiance, together with a subtle perfume, that seemed to all but complete the strange spell that was possessing Mr. Bardine's senses.

"Sir," the Sibyl's musical voice came dreamily floating to his ears, "you have doubtless received the impression that I am a cheap pretender, have you not?"

"Something of the sort," Bardine lazily admitted, while settling himself resignedly in his comfortable chair.

"Before we proceed to business, as you practically suggested, my friend, I wish to prove to you, not only that I am no pretender, but that I have the power to aid you in the recovery of the young lady back to your fatherly arms."

"Yes," indolently.

"In that way," again the low, delicious laugh, "you can, perhaps, judge as to the value of my services. Otherwise, you might deem me something of an extortionist in my demands, you know."

"Oh, yes," absently. "I suppose so, as a matter of course."

"What state of mind are you in at present, Mr. Bardine?"

The man made a great and conscientious effort to rouse himself, and then sunk back with a resigned sigh.

"I don't seem to care much for anything," he replied.

"Ab! can you see me quite plainly?"

"Quite; though, at the same time, through a sort of rosy mist."

"What is most present in your mind, your imagination and your longings?"

"Humph! nothing in particular."

"Yes, there is," with a swift gesture that seemed to slightly convulse him, after which his face and eyes grew suddenly eager and expectant. "Confess that there is."

"Yes, then; there is."

"What is it?"

"An image."

"Of what?"

"Of a woman."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Not of a young girl—of Garda, for instance?"

"No; of a woman."

"What woman?"

"Madelaine!"

Still again the low, sweet laugh, and now with a suggestion of triumph in it, though it was more unreal and dream-like than before.

"Madelaine, eh?"

"Yes."

"You still love Madelaine, then?"

"Well, at all events, I crave her—long for her madly!"

"To the exclusion of any other woman?"

"There is no woman in the world but Madelaine when she fills my imagination, as now."

"Ah! Suppose I should reveal her, living, to you at this moment?"

"You cannot; she is not here. Falconbridge has the eyes of a lynx, and yet he has searched the house from top to bottom without finding a trace of her, while the entrances are guarded. He said so."

"But still, should I produce her temporarily for you by my art?"

"Your art?"

"Yes. Would you then believe me something less of a charlatan than you do now?"

"I should say so. But you cannot produce Madelaine for me."

"Wait and see."

She threw another pinch of powder into the lamp-flame.

There was another flash, and the pinkish changed to a greenish effulgence.

Then a thick, heavily-perfumed cloud rose slowly between woman and man, and out of this cloud the man dreamily heard the woman say, commandingly:

"Receive the newer vision, and behold!"

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

##### DREAM OR REALITY.

The cloud slowly dissipated.

As it did so, the master of Redwood started bolt-upright in his chair, a look of astonishment and ecstasy in his rapt face.

"Can it be?" he murmured. "I cannot realize it!"

The veiled Sibyl had disappeared, and Madelaine was on the divan in her place.

"It is true, Walsingham," she softly responded, in that seductive, never-to-be-forgotten melodious voice of hers—all he dreamed of wild or sweet. "At least, my spiritual semblance is here before you, and that is my true self—the soul, the reality, the deathless Ego of my inmost being!"

More richly, more darkly, more mysteriously, perhaps even more sinfully beautiful than ever, there she was before him—lovely, lovely, lovely, deliriously, magnetically entrancing.

And the guise, the costume, in which she so luxuriously reclined there, smiling strangely at him from the rich consciousness of her own loveliness!

She was dressed as for a ball or the opera, with an opulent revelation of arms and neck such as had never been accorded him before.

And what arms and neck they were—as of the monumental marble in whiteness, and in glistening contrast with the rich olive complexion of the face, and as of the Amazon in the nobility of their contour and development—the arms and neck of a bacchante set in the purest type of Greek sculpture!

The corsage, or waist, was of black velvet, secured at the breast by a tuft of blood-red roses; while the skirt was of shimmering black and white inlaying, brocaded likewise with wreaths of roses, looking as fair and voluptuously suggestive as the natural ones at her bosom; while of jewel or further ornament there was none, save a narrow band of black velvet around the throat, as an additional offset to the gleaming satiny skin.

The dark eyes smoldered with a soft and melancholy fire; a just perceptible flush was in the dark, transparent cheeks; the coral lips were just parted with a haunting smile that might have been of evil, or yet of "some divine despair;" and the midnight lustrousness of her hair, classically arranged, with a careless oread-like knot falling down her back, was as a coronal to the *tout ensemble* of a face and form "fair as the goddess of a god's dream."

Bardine fairly caught his breath.

The very attitude of the woman was sufficient to have tempted a saint back from the threshold of the pellucid gates.

Where had the aged Sibyl vanished to, and by what art had this arch-temptress taken her place?

Marion was forgotten, even this woman's crimes were as if they had never been; Garda herself was lost in the oblivion of this overmastering presence, this superhuman seductiveness.

Again she spoke, or, rather, words dreamily issued from between the perfect lips, reaching his consciousness with the combined effects of a perfume and an aeolian strain, caught from a wind harp hanging amid the branches of a bloom-heavy tropic tree.

"Walsingham," murmured the siren, "I love thee. Tell me, is not this heaven enough for thy spirit and for thy senses, to know just this, if nothing more, that I love thee?"

Accompanying the melody of her words there was a sweet gesture of the arm and hand that convulsed and yet soothed him—a suggestion of the baleful hypnotizing power, mingled with an appeal and an invitation that was as wine shot through with fire.

Even then, however, the truer nature of the man made one last heroic effort to recover itself.

A vain and last attempt.

He could but sink back, catch his breath, and silently feast upon her with enamored eyes.

"Why do you not speak to me?" in a tone of angelic despair. "Am I grown less fair in thy sight, my beloved, that thou shouldst thus regard me in frigid speechlessness?"

"Less fair! frigid!" he repeated, slowly finding the words in a sort of frenzy. "Good God, Madelaine!"

"Speak to me kindly, then."

"Oh, I cannot!" desperate. "For what are you but a vision—a cheat of the eyes—a creation of the senses, rapt or bedeviled, I know not which?"

She smiled, brilliantly at first, and then with a return of the profound melancholy that was even more fascinating.

"What! you think so? Wait!"

She rose, floating to his side.

There was a sumptuous plush-covered ottoman of crimson near his feet.

In an instant she had settled into it crouchingly, and, with her superb arms resting on his knees, while half-reclining against him, was gazing up into his face with those somber yet magnificent eyes of hers, for a glance of which, love-freighted as they were now, albeit with something mysteriously terrible in their depths, an Orient despot might have bartered his treasure-room and his throne.

Her contact was as living fire in his veins, his pulses came and went like throbbing tides.

"Madelaine!"

"Yes, my beloved!"

"Can it—can it be reality?"

"It is, and it is not. But it is the truth, since it is the divine ego, the supreme essence of myself. See!"

She took one of his hands, and, smiling strangely, caused it to touch and caress her hair.

He thrilled at the touch.

Holding his hand then in both her own, she pressed it lightly to her lips.

His ecstasy was as a torture.

Next, and with the gravity deepening in her mystic eyes, she laid his hand lightly upon her neck.

Bardine fairly groaned.

Tannhauser, chained in the bosom of the Venusberg by the white arms of beauty's queen, the dimly remembered purity of his knightly vows behind him, could not have languished more.

But the man still gritted his teeth.

"A glamour! a deception!" he hoarsely muttered.

"What, still? Incurrigible!"

A low, rippling laugh, succeeded by that mystic solemnity of the face and eyes.

Then, leaning back, she stretched out her glorious arms invitingly, her bosom rising and falling in unrest, her lips parted, her heavy-lidded eyes agleam, the blush slowly deepening and crimsoning in her soft cheeks, and then delicately but perceptibly spreading over throat, neck and shoulders.

"Walsingham, my beloved!"

A last struggle of manhood in a death-lock with ignobler sense.

And then she was in his arms, her lips to his, her flexible form strained to his breast in a delirious embrace, the kisses flying between them like a pelting of blossoms in a midsummer storm.

"Am I real to you yet, my beloved?"

The first transport was at an end, and she was once more reclining on the ottoman, looking up into his entranced, yet shame-stricken face, and with his arms about her.

"Yes, yes!"

"Listen, then, Walsingham. You and I must to the business that you would otherwise have transacted with the old witch Legrande."

He started, but she compelled him to still hold her fast, even closer than before.

"Listen, Walsingham. You would have me thus yours forever, would you not?—Not evanescently, as now, but forever and forever, or at least while life remains—as long as warm blood pulses and impassioned breathing throbs and thrills?"

"Heavens! Can you ask it, can you doubt me, Madelaine?"

"Still, I am not so sure but that I would be surer. Wait!"

While furling one arm passionately about his neck, with the other side she made one of her airily or mysteriously powerful gestures.

Instantly the air dimmed, and then, with a convulsive start, followed by a deep sigh, she suddenly lay as a limpse corpse in his embrace.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### SIREN AND VICTIM.

BARDINE was alarmed and amazed.

Could Madelaine, indeed, be dead?

Yet she lay as such in his arms. Her furling clasp of his neck had fallen completely off, her pallor was excessive, her eyes were closed, not a suspicion of remaining breath to flutter through the parted lips, or to give movements to the ravishing bust.

And yet still so entrancingly, so deliriously lovely!

Both mystified and panic-stricken, he caught her to him with a low cry.

His kisses rained upon the cold lips and colder brow. He fondled her as he might have done a little child that he was desirous of arousing out of a lethargic sleep. He chafed her hands, breathed into her lips, and called upon her to come back to him with low moans and plaintive cries and passionate entreaties.

If she only might hear him!

He promised that the pursuit of her should cease from that hour on. He declared that even her past crimes—if crimes they really had been, though he was hazily uncertain of all that now—should be as if they had never been. He swore that she should be his, he hers, thenceforward forever. Even Garda should not part them, for they would divide her between them. She, Madelaine, should remain the sweet child's mother, as he, Walsingham, would be her father and protector.

She, Madelaine, should no longer be a hypnotizer, a mesmerizer, and he, Walsingham, would therefore no longer be her victim, but only her lover, her husband forevermore.

They would go far away together, he and she and the little Garda; far away from this accursed land to some softer, more ideal clime, where Falcon or Sphinxian detectives were not,

where crabbed, cynical old physicians were not, where even Marion (a spasmodic regret at this thought, but no more, so hopelessly was he glamourised) was not; and love, absolute, tameless, delirious love should be their secluded banquet, their sequestered symposium, amid enchanted vistas to the end of all!

All this and even more he promised, averred and pledged in those raving moments.

Oh, if she might only hear him! If she were not dead, but only tranced! If that glorious bosom might but undulate again with its emotional unrest, those perfect lips freshen and throb anew with the rich ruby and the soft pantings of warm life, and those ivory lids but part again from over the midnight splendors of the eyes they vailed!

At last he gave a low, thrilling cry, and then paused in a final agony of uncertainty and suspense.

The placid "deadness" had suddenly increased in her general aspect, and yet there was a flutter of something that was not there before.

"Madelaine, speak to me!" he murmured, brokenly. "Madelaine, for God's sake—for mine!"

There was another flutter, a movement, her eyes suddenly opened, and the color came literally surging, like an imprisoned life-wave, back into her face under the summoning watch-fire of his devouring kisses.

"My own!" he faltered; "my beloved! thou art come back to me?"

She smiled—that deep, that melancholy, that inscrutable smile of hers.

But the arrested life-flood (if it had, indeed, been really arrested, which he was too bewildered or bewitched to inquire into) was pulsing again in all the channels and arteries of which that superb personality was the earthly garment.

She was even responding to his caresses, though more shyly and less diffidently than before.

Then she took his hand, and, pressed close to his bosom, face to face, lip to lip, their wild hearts answering each other's tumults through the intervening walls of palpitating flesh, once again his neck was encircled by the curving white serpent of her bare perfect arm.

"My beloved!" she whispered; "have courage. I heard all!"

The man had become the very plaything of fluctuating moods; and now a sort of panic of regret and fear was suddenly upon him.

"All!" he faltered.

"All that your heart spoke in its ravings—every word, every syllable!" with a subtle exultation in her murmurous response. "It was a trance that mastered only my grosser frame, leaving my soul, my mind, my senses super-humanly animated and susceptible. Ah!"

He echoed her sigh in a strange voice, and though he still retained her in his clasp, and without avertting his face, a slight shudder ran through his frame.

His panic continued. He would have given worlds to have recalled every wild word, every delirious syllable that he had uttered, and which perhaps pledged him irrevocably to this entrancing but unconscionable siren—yes, to the core of his inmost being, he felt that she was and must be unconscionable—dangerous as sin, perilous as perdition's self.

He was enveloped as in a cloud of self-reproach, self-contempt, self-consciousness of a debasement, not the less mortifying in that he felt it had been and might still be irresistible.

And through this sorrowful cloud there looked in upon him two faces by turns—two faces equally pitying, equally reproachful—the faces of Marion Douglass and Garda, his adopted child; the one commiserating even in its contemptuous reproof, the other despairing and pitiable, as who should say: "Well, well; resign me then to the mesmeric demoness—let me go, let me slip back into the seductive, soul destroying toils in which you, too—you, who might have protected and saved me—have at last plunged, only to be lost, lost, lost!"

What should he do? He wanted to be a man, and yet he felt hopelessly that it was not his manhood so much as his spiritual nature that was being thus controlled and debased, against his truer judgment. How then was he blame-worthy or responsible? And yet, he felt vaguely that he was both.

She had evidently mistaken his slight shudder as an evidence of his continued ecstasy.

"Every word, every syllable did I hear," she murmured afresh. "Walsingham, thou art mine, I thine, forever! Unutterable joy! and yet, I would have it uttered. Pledge yourself to me yet again, body and soul, in those delicious words, my sweet!"

Again! He felt that he would sooner die first.

Indeed, he was gradually summoning his better forces preparatory to hurling her from him, as a glittering Lamia, a thing noisome and accursed.

She gave a low, startled cry, for she had suddenly divined the peril of her fascinating power.

Quick, Bardine! now or never is the opportunity. One last, one mighty effort, and you are free!

Alas! it came not!

At that instant her witch-lips were glued to his in such a clinging kiss as might have drained the resolution of a St. Michael, sword in hand—as might the parched lips of thirst itself drain a rich-mantling goblet to the unholly dregs.

Lost, lost!

The intoxication has possessed him in its glowing shroud. He is repeating his every pledge, his wildest vow, his most infatuate declaration; and Madelaine Valdemar the hypnotizer, for the time being at least, has snatched victory out of defeat.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

##### AFTERMATH.

"Now for our compact, Walsingham, my beloved—the interchanged pledge by which we secure one another in the future!"

Drunk with the red wine of that conquering kiss, he was lolling back, listless and pleased, lazily contemplating her beauty under half-closed eyelids, and seemingly oblivious of everything but her ravishing presence.

She had to repeat her words before he seemed able to even half comprehend her.

"Eh? What is that, my love?" he listlessly demanded. "Compact! pledge! Gad!" with a poor chuckle; "haven't we done enough of that already to outlast an eternity?"

"No," gravely, and with a strangely repressed eagerness. "Now listen to me intently, Walsingham. It is only my dual self that you have thus far pledged. My time for the present is short. At any moment the clairvoyante may cause me to disappear, and you will be confronting her, as at the first, instead of me, Madelaine, as now."

The bewilderment slowly returned into his face, and his eyes opened wide.

"Is it merely enchantment, Madelaine?" he exclaimed.

"After a fashion, yes; but, in reality, it is the outcome of an occult power."

"What! and you will really disappear, to be replaced by the Sibyl?"

"Yes."

"And this, clasping her wrists, "is not really you, or all of you?"

"It is and it is not I. It is my Ego, my dual self, my subjective idealism."

"Bosh!" wearily. "I've tried that metaphysical craze in one of my books, and failed."

"It is true," gravely. "However, it is my all, my very self, that you will possess."

"Well, go on, then. Let me think. The clairvoyante produced you for me, as she called, merely to prove her power of betraying you into my hands—the hands of the law—and restoring Garda to my protection, for pay—a consideration."

"That is true."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, in doing this she has overreached herself."

"In what way?"

"Why, now, when I disappear, and she takes my place, of course you will not permit her to sell me into the clutches of the law (as represented by that coarse but deep knave, Falconbridge), at any price."

"Yes," doubtfully.

"In other words, contrary to her expectations, you will refuse to treat with her on any terms: It is this that I wish to compact with you about, and right speedily at that, for my time is short."

"Ah! but there is Garda?"

"Are you merely dull, or perverse, my beloved? Of course, in having me, you would have her."

"Good, good! And then as to this hideous power, this hypnotism, of yours?" with a frown.

"I swear to you to renounce it forever from the hour that we are permanently united."

"That is well."

"No more need of that, my Walsingham. We will live on love. Afar in the bosom of that remote and Eden clime, which you yourself so luxuriously imaged forth, our perpetual banquet and our elixir-drink shall be the reciprocating passion that grows forever by what it feeds on, and is consequently deathless. Our Garda will flit between us or at our sides, a happy angel of delight, the Hebe of our ceaseless feast, the Iris of our power. The past shall be as a dream; we shall live but in the present."

It was a sufficient evidence of the debilitating enchantment in which the man was steeped to the very lips, that even in this mawkish gush he saw nothing to excite either his scorn or his risibles, but actually participated in the cheap poetizing it expressed.

"Madelaine, if demoness you are, it is as the very queen of the Beautiful Lost!" cried Bardine. "What is it that I must compact with you, Madelaine?"

"We must compact with one another: You to refuse absolutely to treat with Madame Legrande, and to forbid Falconbridge and Dr. Cheatham to think further of pursuing me; I to let you know within ten hours where you alone can meet my daughter and myself, to part no more."

"Humph! what will they all think of my sudden change of base?"

"Vouchsafe no explanation, and let them think what they will."

"Odd for Legrande to have overreached herself in this way, isn't it?"

"I should say so; but no more than she deserves."

"You can't admire the antique Sibyl very greatly?"

"I hate her!"

"Eh?"

"Would she not have betrayed me? But, Walsingham, the time is fast slipping away, and my lease of continuance here is precarious."

"I know, I know! There was one thing more; what was it? Oh!" And his face flushed, a passion of shame and regret rushing into it.

She caught the alarm.

"What is it?" she cried, anxiously.

He gave a sort of moan, and covered his face with his hands.

"Marion!" he groaned.

It was well for Madelaine that he did not see the infernal expression that leaped into her face, but was gone in a flash.

She fairly tore away his hands, and, with both arms twined about his neck, her kiss of fire again fastened upon his quivering lips.

"Do you compact with me, as I demand?" she cried, when he had once more sunk back, ecstasized and bewildested. "Is it a pledge of honor between us?"

"Yes, yes; what you will!

"Your hand on it, my beloved."

But, scarcely had the hand-clasp been taken than she cried, in a choking voice: "Farewell, Walsingham, farewell, and remember! I am going-going! the spell snaps!" And, as the perfumed and greenish cloud again formed in the air, she drifted away from his embrace, and was withdrawn and dissolved into its bosom.

Bardine started up and rubbed his eyes, mystified and amazed.

Madelaine had melted into the cloud, the cloud itself had dissolved, and the veiled Sibyl was calmly confronting him from her luxurious attitude on the divan as matter-of-factly as if she had not stirred from thence.

"Well, Mr. Bardine," she said, in the remembered musical voice, which seemed so unlike and yet like Madelaine's. "What do you think of my power to aid you now?"

He made no answer.

"Come, tell me, my friend!" Again the low, rippling laugh. "Do you still think me a charlatan—a mere pretender?"

"That you certainly are not, ma'm," he suddenly replied.

"Well, can I, or can I not, betray Madelaine into your detective's hands, as I promised to do, think you—for a consideration?"

"You certainly cannot and shall not; for I shall not ask you to." And he unceremoniously arose.

The Sibyl suddenly sat up like a bolt, and in evident alarm.

"What do you mean by that?" she cried.

"Simply this," abruptly and sternly: "That I cheerfully wash my hands of you, ma'm!" with a contemptuous gesture.

The veiled Sibyl also arose, hurriedly, and apparently in consternation.

"Sir, you are no gentleman!" she cried, angrily.

"Am I not? Well," still with traces of bewilderment in his stolidity, "perhaps I am not without my own doubts upon that point. And what then?"

"You must treat with me for the production of the woman and the girl!" desperately.

"I can produce them without your assistance."

"Ha! don't think it. What has bewitched you? Has the hallucination of Madelaine's presence, at the bidding of my art, been so life-like as actually to turn your head?"

"No matter; I refuse to bargain."

"Wait! I shall betray her to you for a comparative song; a thousand dollars—five hundred?"

"Out of my path, hag!"

She had sprung before him, and even laid an arresting hand upon him.

"You shall not go!" she exclaimed, hoarsely, her eyes seemingly blazing at him through her veil in a fury of alarm and baffled rage. "It isn't fair! You came to bargain with me, and you shall!"

"Nonsense! Woman, you have outwitted yourself. Stand aside!"

"I will not! Two hundred dollars, then, and my services are yours!"

"Not a dollar! Do not tempt me to forget that you are a woman, even if you are a black-mailer."

"I sha'n't be treated in this manner!" fairly screamed the Sibyl. "I care nothing for your respectability! At a breath, I can disgrace you—blast you in the public eye! I shall summon my son and my sister and Dr. Weisman as witnesses!"

But at this moment, and while she still frantically strove to bar his approach to the folding-doors, they were suddenly and violently wrenched back on the other side by Falconbridge.

#### CHAPTER XLVI.

##### ELUCIDATION.

THE astonishment of those who had been kept in waiting for the past hour or so in the adjoining front room, and whose action in bursting open the doors had been prompted by the high voices issuing from the sanctum, can be readily imagined at the excited appearance of the Sibyl and her interviewer when they came into view.

"He is a cheat—a scoundrel!" cried the veiled woman, her whilom musical utterance sounding cracked and shrill. "He suddenly washes his hands of me, as he calls it. But I will be revenged! Mark you all; were he twenty times the rich master of Redwood Grange, I will be revenged!"

Mr. Bardine had strode indifferently into the room—and yet with a strange fixity of countenance that was at once remarked with mystification by his friends, but more especially by Marion—and taken up his hat and cane.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Cheatham; "what does it all mean, Bardine?"

"Simply, that I have given up all idea of pursuing Miss Valdemar," he stolidly replied, though perceptibly wincing under Marion's inquiring gaze. "I will have none of it; so there is an end."

"And Garda?" quietly demanded Mrs. Douglass, whose surprise was being replaced by a look of saddened comprehension, or something of the sort.

His face tightened, and, turning rudely away from her regard, he, without answering, made an impatient gesture that they should be off.

But the veiled woman was by this time apparently half frantic, at the thought of losing her expected fee, and continued her protestations.

However, whether she somewhat overdid it, or for some other cause, the Sphinx Detective quietly occupied himself with studying her anger and Bardine's strange stolidity, while the old physician also remained unobtrusively observant, with an expression of mingled wonder and mystification in his quizzical old face.

In the course of the altercation, however, allusions were naturally thrown out as to the recent mysteries in the consultation-room, which could not but be more or less understood by the witnessess.

"Oho!" broke in Falconbridge at last, "there has been, then," with a sneer, "some sort of a dream-interview with Madelaine herself, eh?"

"Yes, there has!" exclaimed the Sibyl. "I produced her semblance (her second self) in my place, as a test of my magnetic capacity, for this gentleman's befoof. And, since the dispersion of the image he refuses a further consideration of my offer."

"Oh, rot!" commented the detective, with ineffable disgust.

"It is true," composedly observed Bardine, with his new doggedness.

"What!" exclaimed Falconbridge; "you really had communion with Madelaine, at this charlatan's instance?"

"I'll have you indicted for defamation!" shrilly interposed the veiled Sibyl, furiously clinching her hands. "Not one of you but shall rue to-night's work, and its insults to me!"

"Be quiet!" sternly, and Falconbridge repeated his question.

"Yes," answered Bardine, impatiently; "with Madelaine, or with her double, God only knows which! and likely enough at this old bloodsucker's instance, in one way or another."

"Oh!" and then, with an exasperated gesture, the Sibyl merely ground her teeth, as if despairing of further justification by word of mouth.

She was not unheeded.

"So!" said the detective, eying Mr. Bardine with mingled pity and contempt. "This is the explanation, in some sort, of your unexpected change of front?"

"It is none of your business, sir!" was the angry response.

"You are mistaken," coldly. "It shall be made my particular business from this moment forth."

"Pooh! The pursuit of Miss Valdemar shall be prosecuted no further. There is an end of it."

"It is not and shall not be the end!" exclaimed Falconbridge, the unpleasant metallic ring coming into his voice, while his bird-of-prey eyes were as glinting steel. "My reputation is at a stake in this matter, sir, if yours is not, and it shall be vindicated."

Mr. Bardine flushed, and he was perhaps not unwilling to lose some of his embarrassment in ill-temper.

He snapped his fingers.

"What do you take me for?" he contemptuously demanded. "That for you and your reputation!"

But the detective had suddenly bent his ear to a movement of some sort going on in the outer passage, and was either deaf or indifferent to the injurious words.

"Wait!" And, with a deprecating gesture, he stepped swiftly to the door.

Opening it, and glancing out, he turned with an immovable face, and closing the door carelessly again, stood with his back to it.

"Sir," said he, respectfully to Mr. Bardine, "will you vouchsafe me the consideration of a few questions that I would put to you?"

The Sibyl would have interposed, but that the master of Redwood imperatively waved her back.

"Yes," he replied, curtly, "if that shall end this matter between us."

"I promise it shall be so, if you expressly desire it, after I shall have finished."

"Go on, then!"

"You really think that you have had a so-called spiritual interview with Madelaine Valdemar in yonder consultation room?"

"I do."

"And at that woman's instance?" pointing at the veiled figure.

"Yes."

"That is, at the instance of Madame Legrande?"

"Yes."

"If I should at this moment expose to you that you have been cunningly hoodwinked by both Madame Legrande and the Valdemar woman acting in collusion will you acknowledge the fraud?"

Here the Sibyl would have made a violent interposition of some sort—she was greatly agitated, in fact—but that Dr. Cheatham and Mrs. Douglass, in obedience to a significant sign from the detective, unceremoniously grasped her by either arm.

"You cannot do that," replied Bardine, incredulously, "without stultifying yourself, Falconbridge. For you yourself pretended to thoroughly search the premises here for Madelaine, and without finding a trace of her."

"I will answer as to that," continued the detective. "I confess that I, too, have been hoodwinked up to the present moment. I merely repeat my query: Will you be convinced of your error, if I make the exposition just proposed by me?"

"In that case, certainly."

The detective at once reopened the door, and called out into the passage: "Come!"

Tommy Dodd and a policeman first appeared. They were followed by William, the still partly dazed flunkie, and old McAntrim, the hermit squatter of the rocks, with a scared-looking elderly lady firmly held between them.

The last-mentioned personage was the Comtesse de Rataplan, alias Madame Legrande, the clairvoyante proprietress of the "queer house!"

"Where did you find this woman?" demanded Falconbridge of the group.

"In a secret little side-niche half-way through the underground passage, boss," Tommy Dodd took it upon himself to reply. "The cop here and I thought it would pay to make another exploration thereabouts and it did, as you see. Then we went further on up into the shanty and brought these two along with us."

The detective nodded.

Then striding up to the now half-fainting Sibyl, he unceremoniously tore aside her veil.

Madelaine herself stood revealed, as a matter of course!

Pale and haggard, there was no other evidence needed of her utterly crushed and desperate condition—of her acceptance of the fact that she had played her last card and lost.

Both women were silent, and every one was left to his or her own reflections as to the particular manner in which the trick had been worked.

To the reader it will be sufficiently evident that, had it succeeded, the clairvoyante would have doubtless received at the hands of the grateful and triumphant hypnotizer (as Bardine's bride) a much larger moneyed consideration than she could have hoped to gain by the mere betrayal of the latter's place of concealment.

Mr. Bardine had dropped into a chair; the picture of mortification, while making an abhorrent gesture in the direction of the baffled schemer, who had acted her part so nearly to success, that was sufficiently significant.

Who was there left to pity or stand by him in this, his final hour of bitterness and humiliation?

And yet there was a sympathizing touch on his shoulder.

He looked up to perceive that it was from Marion, who had gravely taken up her station by his side, and was looking down gently into his face.

What is there that the loving heart of woman will not forgive in its boundless charity for the loved one?

He simply laid his hand on hers with a poor, grateful gesture.

Madelaine burst into a discordant laugh, which had something of a death-bell's hollowness in it.

#### CHAPTER XLVII.

##### DENOUEMENT.

"LEGRANDE, my dear," she called out, stepping forward, "we find ourselves decidedly *de trop*, it seems. Get me some sort of wrap, and then send Raphael for a coach for me."

The detective peremptorily stepped between her and the door, and, at an imperative sign from him, the clairvoyante remained unmoved.

"Sir, do you place this entire matter now in my hands?" he asked of Mr. Bardine.

The latter simply lowered his head assenting.

"Woman!" the detective sternly addressed himself to Madelaine, "you must deal with me."

She had grown yet paler but retained her forced composure.

"Well?" was all she said.

"What will you do to save yourself from being jailed on the instant, your prosecution to follow at the earliest moment?"

"Jail me, if you please," with a last attempt at bravado. "It will be a pretty exposure all around."

"I do not shrink from exposure."

She shivered.

"Don't imprison me!" she pleaded. "I—I will go away, never to return."

"You shall do more than that."

"What is it?"

"Tommy Dodd here shall be the messenger, while we all await his return. Instruct him forthwith and accordingly. Wait! Is your new hiding-place near or remote?"

"Not far away."

"Good! Let him return here within one hour, accompanied by the girl, Garda, together with your diary, once in my possession, and the papers you stole in reference to Mrs. Gordon's Scotch inheritance. Otherwise you will rue it."

She seemed to reflect.

"What," after a pause, "will you accord me, in return for my compliance with this demand?"

"Wait and find out! Do as I command on the instant, or accept the consequences."

She hesitated, biting her lip, and the color flashing back into her face for an instant, only to desert it again.

Then she asked for a blank card and pencil. These being supplied, she wrote something rapidly, and with a firm hand.

"Here!" she said, handing the card to the lad. "Go!"

Tommy scanned the writing, and incontinently darted away, without a word.

The ominous and oppressive silence that prevailed during his absence was punctuated, as you might say, by the peculiar, half-insane look which William, the Cockney, fastened upon Madelaine—a look that might have caused any other woman to shudder—and the calm, contemptuous persistence with which the woman disregarded it.

At the end of half an hour, Tommy Dodd returned, accompanied by Garda, and carrying the missing diary and papers, which he at once placed in the detective's hands.

Garda, who was looking especially bewildered and anxious, at once rushed into the embrace of Mr. Bardine and Marion, without so much as glancing at her guilty mother.

The latter had evidently steeled herself for the worst, for she remained outwardly indifferent to the action, and simply looked expectantly, perhaps a little supplicatingly, at Falconbridge.

He examined the diary and papers, finally handing over the latter to Mrs. Douglass.

Then he looked up coldly, and beckoned to William, who eagerly sprung forward.

"Take this woman!" he said, contemptuously, pointing to the hypnotizer. "She is yours. You had the gift once before; be sure that you take better care of it this time!"

Madelaine made a savage effort to cast off the huge-handed grasp that was forthwith laid upon her wrist, but with a low, dangerous chuckle, William rudely restrained his hold, and even tucked the wrist under his arm with a coarse significance of proprietorship.

"Send for a coach," she at length murmured, "and I shall submit."

This was accordingly done, and the ill-assorted couple went silently away.

Then the detective administered a fitting rebuke and warning to the proprietress of the "queer house," and the extraordinary night's adventures were at an end.

It might as well be stated here that McAntrim was fairly rewarded for his slight share in the *denouement*, and that, when last heard of, he and the inglorious Mr. Strathspey (who was released in due time, without any charge being pressed against him), were in partnership in the junk-collecting business in a different quarter of the extreme up-town district.

Our strange story, as I think the reader will grant it to be, has drawn to a close.

Apart from its mysterious heroine's mysterious fate, it remains but to say that Walsingham Bardine and Marion Douglass were happily married a month later, and soon afterward set out upon a bridal tour in Scotland, taking the unfortunate Garda with them. With regard to the latter, it is a happiness to say that she is now, after two years, a pensively beautiful but physically and mentally healthful and robust young lady of nineteen, the dark shadow of whose past life seems to be becoming more and more like an unsubstantial dream, while she remains the treasure of her adoptive parents' love, notwithstanding that a sweet little flower-child of their own has come to bless their union.

As to Madelaine, the Siren, a last tragedy and mystery must be recorded.

On the second morning following the foregoing revelations, a man was found murdered in his bed—stabbed to the heart—in a cheap New York lodging-house, to which he had retired with a singularly beautiful companion, represented as his wife, on the preceding evening. A marriage-certificate, dated the previous day, and containing the names William Lowden (the footman's full name) and Madelaine Valdemere, as the contracting parties, was found in the murdered man's clothes, together with a few valuables. His companion had mysteriously disappeared. She has never been seen or heard of since; and, after fruitless efforts to trace her, the ill-starred menial's remains were decently interred at Mr. Bardine's expense. That gentleman likewise furnished certain strange items as to the history of the unfortunate man and his vanished companion (presumably his murderer) which only served to heighten the mystery of the affair in a manner that must long linger in the public recollection.

Dr. Cheatham and Falconbridge the detective, had, soon after this, a serious misunderstanding that has never since been healed. It is said to have risen from a flat refusal on the part of the latter to satisfy the retired physician's curiosity respecting the contents of a certain criminal diary, presumptively both startling and unique in its disclosures, to say nothing of its possible value to psychological science.

Be that as it may, the detective calmly maintains his exclusive right to the diary in question. Whether it shall be given to the wonder-craving public, edited by himself, at some future day, he is sufficiently communicative to say will depend altogether upon the chance of the diarist dying before himself, and that fact coming authentically to his knowledge. In such case, he will publish it; otherwise not.

In the mean time, the fate, no less than the secret early history—and what a strange history it might prove—of the remarkable woman who has figured, not inaptly it is hoped, as the fabled island-witch, Calypso, *reveribus*, in the foregoing tale, must remain, we fear, a secret of psychological mystery.

THE END.

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